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ABSTRACT

This course in supervisory and communication skills developed especially for hospital employees is designed to be taught onsite and to complement a hospital's other training and staff development efforts. The topical focus is workplace communication. It is designed as a 16-hour course, with two 8-hour sessions. The curriculum guide consists of a list of course goals, list of homework assignment, and informational materials, activities, and exercises for these topics: good communication--different styles; the basics of supervision; the basics of communication; writing; reading; listening; speaking; and practical applications: using the basics. The following readings are attached: Communication in a Healthcare Setting, Listening Isn't Easy, Writing on the Job, A Model of the Writing Process, Writing Memos and Short Reports, Sample Performance Evaluation, and Communication Log. The teacher's guide explains the philosophy of the course. It lists course goals (including participant role, instructor role, and evaluation) and offers sample lesson plans. Each lesson plan has a brief narrative description of class activities and goals and a time plan. The teacher's guide also describes how teachers can adapt the course to make it more work-related and more responsive to different audiences. Suggestions for recordkeeping conclude the guide. (YLB)

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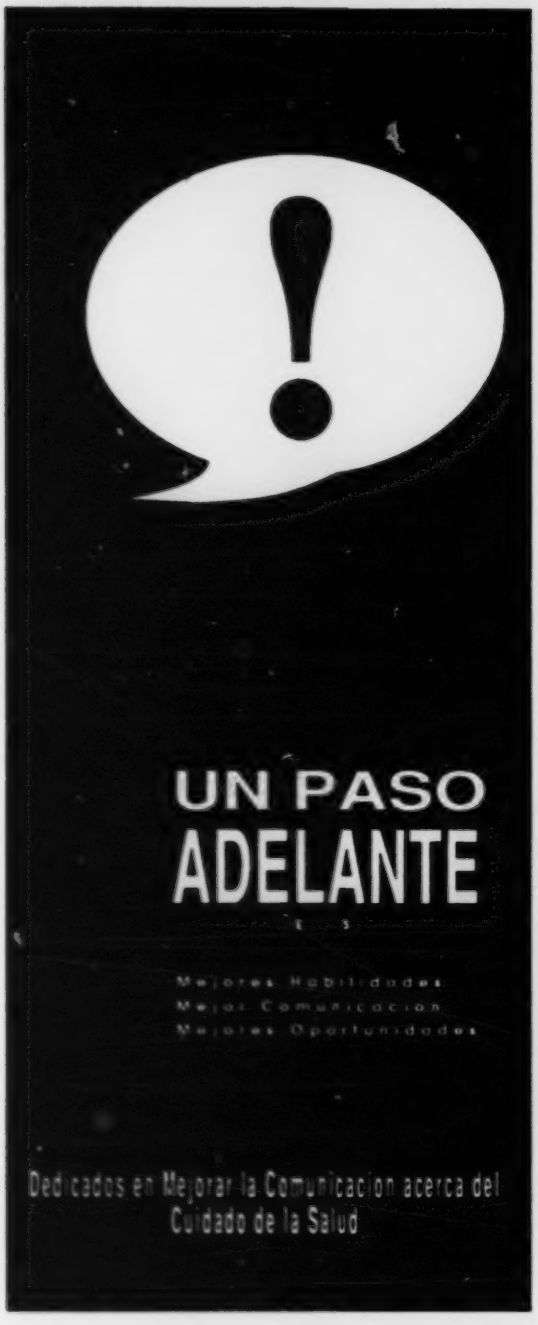

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WHAT IS
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AHEAD
Better Skills
Better Communication
Better Opportunities
Committed to Improved Health Care Communication

p r e s e n t s

Communication for Supervisors

CE 066 513

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Communication for Supervisors

An offering of Step *Ahead:*

A Partnership for Improved Health Care Communication

Sponsored by

The Hospitals of New Mexico
and
The Department of English
New Mexico State University

Revised 9/15/92

COMMUNICATION FOR SUPERVISORS was developed by **Step *Ahead***: A Partnership for Improved Health Care Communication. **Step *Ahead*** is funded in large part by the U. S. Department of Education as a National Workplace Literacy Demonstration Project. Our other partners include The New Mexico Coalition for Literacy and seventeen hospitals within New Mexico.

Step *Ahead* brings short courses and on-site tutoring to hospitals. Our training project helps health care workers improve their job-related communication and literacy skills. As a demonstration project, we are eager to share our materials with others who are engaged in not-for-profit literacy work. If you would like to use our materials, please write for permission to:

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Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003

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We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of our partner organizations and especially wish to thank our many students who told us it really did make a difference.

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Dr. Stephen A. Bernhardt and Dr. Paul R. Meyer, Co-Directors

Table of Contents

Table of Contents i
Course Plan ii

Introduction

Course Goals 1
Points to Remember 2
Homework Assignments 3

Good Communication–Different Styles

Focusing on Communication 4
Communication Styles–Work Styles 5
What's Your Communication/Work Style? 6
Communication Styles and Work Styles: Think It Through 8

The Basics of Supervision

What Supervisors Do–Different Types of Tasks 9
Managing People and Work - Making the Transition 10
Some Definitions 12
Leadership 13
Needs and Motivation 14
From Needs to Motivation 15
Total Quality Management (TQM) 16
Managing Time 17

The Basics of Communication

The Communication Triangle 18
Communication Skills Diagram 19

Writing

The Writing Process 20
Purpose and Audience Worksheet 21
Some Planning Strategies 22
Drafting Strategies 24
Revising and Editing Checklist 25
Strategies for Quick Writing 26

Reading

Active Reading 28
SQ3R 29

Listening

Active Listening: How to Hear 31
Listening to Understand People: Empathy 33
Listening to Understand the Situation: Paraphrasing 35

Body Language....37
Behaviors that Shortcircuit Listening....38

Speaking

Speaking vs. Writing....40
How to Discuss....41
Open and Closed Questions....43

Practical Applications: Using the Basics

Setting Goals and Staying on Track
Improving Performance with Clear Goals....44
Praise People for Accomplishing Goals....46
Reprimand Behavior, Not People....47
Making Assignments....48
Issuing Instructions....49
Planning and Running a Meeting....50

Giving Feedback and Handling Problems
Reviewing The Writing of Others....52
Solving Problems....54
Coping with Criticism....56
Coping with Criticism Exercise....58
Problem People....60
Confronting....63
Confronting: Practice....65

Measuring Progress and Evaluating Performance
Why Do Performance Appraisals?....67
Managing Performance Appraisals....68

Wrap Up and Evaluation

Readings

Communication in a Healthcare Setting....71
Listening Isn't Easy....77
Writing on the Job....79
A Model of the Writing Process....84
Writing Memos and Short Reports....88
Sample Performance Evaluation....92
Communication Log....95

Course Goals

At the end of this course, participants should:

- ❒ understand the demands on supervisors to be good communicators
- ❒ understand different communication styles and work styles and how to take advantage of differences in supervising people
- ❒ understand how to manage writing and reading activities
- ❒ feel more comfortable praising, reprimanding and setting goals
- ❒ know how to use writing as a management tool
- ❒ know how to listen to understand people and situations
- ❒ understand which types of communication are appropriate in different situations
- ❒ _____
- ❒ _____
- ❒ _____
- ❒ _____
- ❒ _____

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Points to Remember

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Homework Assignments

Communication Log: At the back of this book, you will find a set of Professional Communication Logs. For next class period, keep track of your professional communication during work on one day. Each time you talk, meet, or write to someone, take a few seconds to record the event in your log. We want you recognize exactly how much of your day is spent communicating and how you are accomplishing work when you speak and write. We also want to compare the amount of communication in various jobs within the hospital.

Memo to Self: Evaluate your communication style in a memo to yourself. Show evidence of what kind of communicator you are. Provide evidence of where you do well in communicating on the job and areas you need to improve.

Think of this as a report of information you discovered while doing your Professional Commmunication Log. You can also use what you learned from our first day of readings, discussions, and class exercises.

Panel Discussion: We will begin our second day with a panel discussion with good supervisors and managers. You will have the chance to ask them how they handle the various communication demands of supervising. Think ahead of time what you would like to ask an experienced supervisor or what kinds of problems you would like to discuss.

Readings: There are several readings on hospital communication, the writing process, and listening skills toward the back of this coursebook. We invite you to spend some time with these articles. They will reinforce what we are talking about during class. You should also go back through the course materials to make sense of what we covered during our first session.

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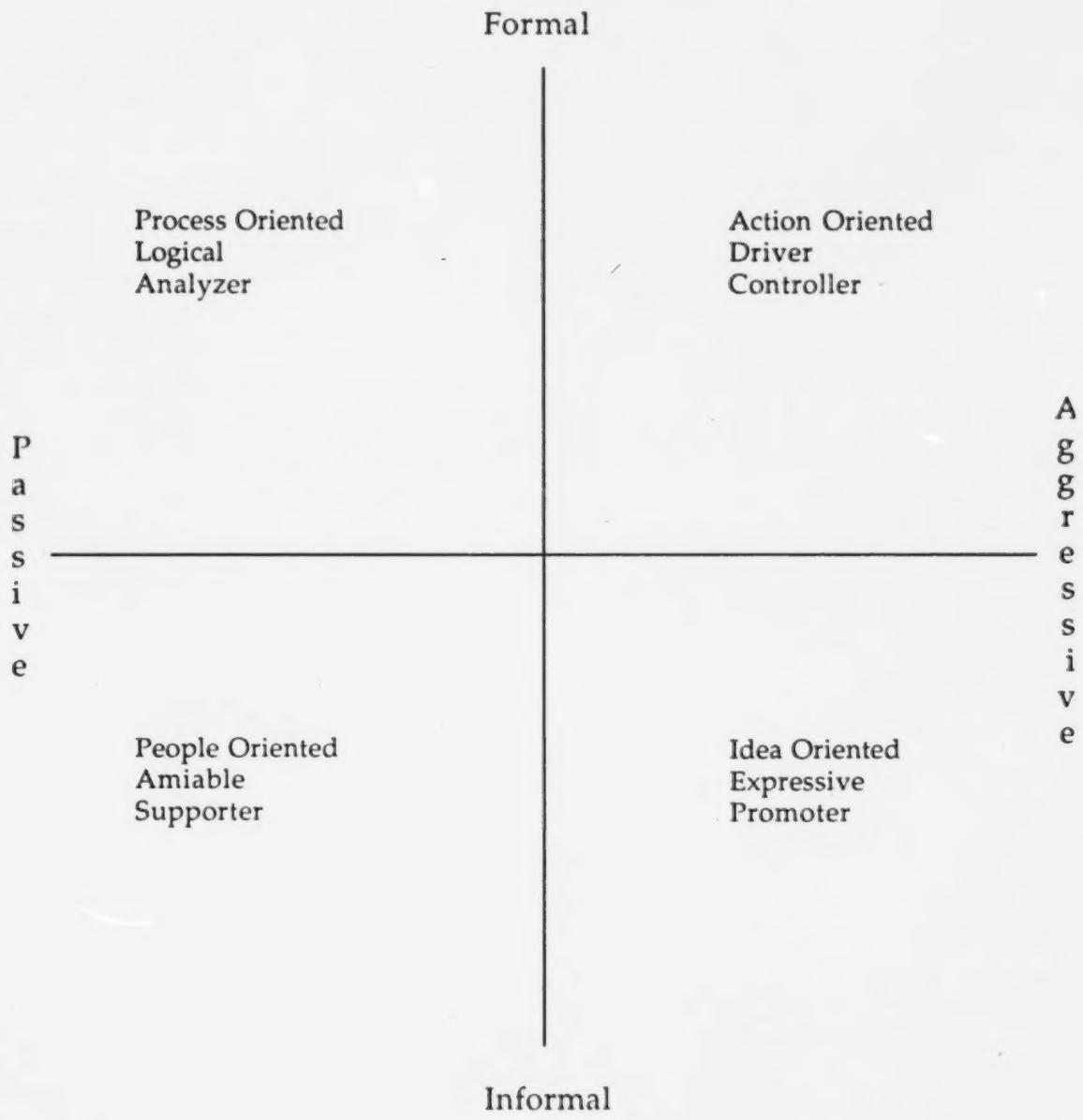
Focusing on Communication

Let's get started by thinking about supervisor communication in a hospital. Think about those supervisors and managers you work under and those you have observed. Focus on the ways they communicate with their staff. Then complete the following thoughts:

When I think of bad supervisor communication, I think of . . . .

When I think of good supervisor communication, I think of . . . .

Communication Styles–
Work Styles



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What's Your Communication/Work Style?

Conflict sometimes arises when you are trying to discuss a problem with someone who has a different communication style than you do. Each person has her own way of communicating that makes her feel comfortable. When someone who is action-oriented is having a discussion with someone who is people-oriented, there can be conflict. The action-oriented person wants to *do* something; she will push for some kind of action. The idea-oriented person imagines whether people will like the idea or whether they will be supportive. The people-oriented person will worry about people's feelings, while the action-oriented person will feel frustrated if things don't happen fast.

These communication styles also parallel people's work styles. Understanding that different people have different communication styles and different work styles will make you a more effective supervisor. When you understand that people approach communication and work assignments differently, you may be able to understand and deal with some of the conflicts that arise.

You may find that some of the conflicts are really due to different styles. You may also be able to make more effective assignments by taking into account the kind of assignment and the strengths of each particular style. Strengths and weaknesses of each particular style are listed below, along with the characteristics which will help you recognize each.

Action-oriented Communicators

- Let's get it done, move ahead. What's the bottom line?
- Direct, impatient, decisive, quick, energetic.
- Short attention span, tend to interrupt, hate small talk.
- Body language and vocal cues tend to be accurate.

Strengths

Organized, Focused, Time-conscious

Weaknessess

Authoritarian, Unemotional, Demanding

Idea-oriented Communicators

- Let's try something new. Consider this possibility.
- Full of ideas, provocative, difficult to understand.
- Like to challenge others, hate rules and regulations.
- Nonverbal cues and vocal cues vary; when gathering ideas, they like to be alone and may be withdrawn. When promoting ideas, their energy increases.

Strengths

Creative, Energetic, Open-minded

Weaknesses

Undisciplined, Defensive, Weak on Details

People-oriented Communicators

- What do we need? How do people feel? What do people believe? Let's form a team. Let's form a committee.
- Spontaneous, empathetic, subjective, hate procedures and rules that fail to consider people as individuals.
- Body language tends to be open and their voices varied.

Strengths

Outgoing, Empathetic, Good Listener

Weaknesses

Unassertive, Unfocused, Hates Deadlines

Process-oriented Communicators

- What's the procedure? Let's plan, set goals, analyze. Is there a policy statement?
- Systematic, patient, logical, unemotional, cautious.
- Long attention span, hates off-the-cuff reactions.
- Offer minimal body language and vocal cues.

Strengths

Logical, Thorough, Systematic

Weaknesses

Indecisive, Critical, Closed-minded

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Communication Styles and Work Styles: Think It Through

1. Which communication type are you? How about the people close to you? What characteristics or traits did you use to help y.u decide?

2. What is a conflict you had recently? Could it have been caused in part because of different communication styles? Explain why. Are there any people (withhold the names to protect the innocent) that you consistently have difficulty with? Could communication styles help explain the problem?

3. Think of some of the tasks in your workgroup. Think about the styles of some of the people in your group. Are there ways to match tasks with communication/work styles?

What Supervisors Do–Different Types of Tasks

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Managing People and Work - Making the Transition

Many people are good at doing their own jobs. They know what is expected of them and they make sure they get it done well and on time. When these same people try to make the transition to managing other people, things don't go so well. Let's look at some common problems and see what we might do to solve them.

1. John recently became a supervisor in medical records. He always got along with everyone when they were on the same footing. But now he sees his primary job as giving orders. His people are beginning to feel that he doesn't care about their feelings or all the work they have to do. He acts bossy and rude. Even when someone does a job fast and well, he never praises them. His people are beginning to rebel against John by slowing down their work and not telling him what he needs to know. They would rather he looked bad to his own supervisors. They don't feel he's part of the group anymore.

As John's friend, what would you do or what advice would you give him?

2. Jackie recently became a supervisor in the cafeteria. She was always able to do what others told her, but now she needs to keep track of what work is getting done. Unfortunately, she's having a hard time because she is not very organized. José asked for Friday off, but Jackie forgot his request and his name was in the usual slot on the schedule. When her manager left a memo asking about staffing for next month, she forgot to get back to him because she was so busy. Her people are frustrated because things seem disorganized and out of control. Her supervisor is having doubts about her ability to handle the job.

As a fellow supervisor on a different shift, what would you suggest to Jackie?

3. Eduardo is a new supervisor in the supply area. He was always one of the most popular members of his group before he was promoted. Even when the work load was heavy or problems came up, he could be counted on to pitch in, to tell a joke, and to keep everyone's spirits up. Now that he is a supervisor, he can't resist joining in group discussions or helping out when problems come up. He feels that he can't just ignore his friends, but he is having trouble getting reports done on time and keeping ordering and scheduling up to date. The business office is complaining about last-minute requests and missing papers.

As a former supervisor in the supply area, what advice would you give to Eduardo?

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Some Definitions

Listed below are some definitions which may help you to understand some of the new ideas or concepts we will be discussing. You may already be familiar with some of them; others may be new to you. Remember that some of the definitions given are only one way to look at things; some of the definitions are controversial or can depend on your point of view. They are simply a starting point for some of our discussions later.

leadership - the ability to inspire others to accomplish a task or achieve a goal

supervision: being responsible for helping others get their work done

needs - something employees want that leads to satisfaction (if they get it) or frustration (if they don't)

motivation - something that gets someone to do something and to keep doing it

goals - end results, rewards, or the object of motivated behavior

objectives - like goals, but things which must be obtained or learned before an activity is considered successful; usually measurable

outcomes - the results of our activities or our communications

reinforcement - anything which causes a positive behavior to be continued or a negative behavior to be stopped

TQM - Total Quality Management, a way of doing business that emphasizes involving everyone in continuous improvement

empathy - the ability to understand a situation from another's point of view; being able to put oneself in another's shoes

paraphrasing - repeating the general idea of what someone else says to encourage understanding; a way of demonstrating empathy

listening - hearing what someone else says without preconceptions or distractions; using your ears, mind and heart to understand

communication - what we cannot not do when we interact with others

writing process - a model of the way we plan and do our writing

audience - anyone who may hear or read things we say or write; the person or persons who are intended to get our communication

purpose - why we are writing, speaking, or listening

effectiveness - doing things right the first time

efficiency - doing things with the fewest resources or in the shortest time

resources - anything we use to accomplish a task; knowledge, skills, people, money, equipment, time, facilities, etc.

performance appraisal - one of the most stressful activities you will do as a supervisor; also one of the most important ways to improve performance

Leadership

You have watched many leaders in action--in your work group, in hospital management, in your community. You have probably developed some ideas about what leadership means or what some of the characteristics of good leadership are. What characterizes good leadership? List the qualities below that create effective leadership:

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Needs and Motivation

Much of motivation theory is based on the idea of needs. People have certain needs which must be satisfied in some way to help them maintain a sense of balance. If they feel that their job will help them to satisfy those needs, they will be motivated to continue to do a good job. Some typical needs are listed below. Rank order them as you see their importance. Put a 1 by the most important need, a 2 by the second most important, and so on. Add others that you feel are important at the bottom and rank them too.

___ People need to feel they are contributing to an important effort.

___ People need to feel well liked and respected as individuals.

___ People need to feel that their good work is recognized and appreciated.

___ People need to be treated fairly.

___ People need to be given the authority to make decisions and solve problems.

___ People need feedback to help them do a better job.

___ People need to be paid at a competitive rate.

___ People need to find a balance between family/personal life and work life.

___ People need to feel like they are an important member of the team or group.

___ People need to feel that they are helping or caring for others.

___ People need to feel they are learning new skills and information.

___

From Needs to Motivation

As you can see from the rankings above, everybody has different needs and priorities. If you understand your employees' needs and meet those needs, you will motivate them. Listed below are six ways to motivate employees to do their best.

- Be specific about what you want done and how you want it done. Ask for performance in specific ways. Employees will generally respond positively to clear, specific directions. But be open to suggestions of better or more efficient ways to do things. Otherwise, there is no way for an employee to demonstrate creativity or individuality.
- Offer praise and positive reinforcement for good work and for specific improvements. Remember, nothing succeeds like success. When employees are successful, praise them for it and encourage them to continue.
- Treat your employees like real people, demonstrating that you trust them and respect their individuality. Building real relationships will help you to understand them and to know what their needs are.
- Bring your people into the decision-making process. If you tell them what has to be done and listen to their suggestions or opinions before you tell them how to do it, they will be much more cooperative. Even if they end up doing it your way, they will feel that their ideas have been listened to. And you may find some really good suggestions that you hadn't thought of.
- Show your people what you want. Modeling expected behavior is one of the most effective ways to get improved performance. Actions really do speak louder than words. If you demonstrate that you are committed to quality, are able to meet deadlines, and feel that your job is important, your employees will notice and respond.
- Let the employee know when performance is not meeting the standards you have set. If you ask for performance and praise it when you get it, you must also acknowledge when you don't get it. This may take the form of coaching to show what you want, or it may be as strong as a reprimand or discipline. Whatever it is, it shows that you are asking for a commitment to high standards.

Remember, your employees will live up (or down) to your expectations. If you let them know that you have high expectations for them and confidence that they can achieve them, they will generally work to meet those expectations. On the other hand, if they feel that you don't have confidence in them and don't expect them to be able to handle the job, they will meet that expectation too. If you can ask them to do a little more than they have done before, they will feel challenged, they will have an opportunity to grow, and they will feel a real sense of accomplishment when they get the job done. And you will have a confident and motivated employee who is ready and eager to tackle the next challenge.

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Total Quality Management (TQM)

Total Quality Management is a philosophy that is making major changes in the ways that work and workplaces are organized and how they function. It is increasingly important to the way that health care workplaces are organized. In fact, all hospitals will be required to be TQM organizations in the near future. Some of the key principles and ways that they may affect you and your work group are:

1. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT - this is often referred to as continuous learning, continuous process improvement, or continuous quality improvement. It basically means that everyone in an organization needs to be committed to constantly improving whatever they are doing. People can't be satisfied with what is good today; they need to make it even better tomorrow. This can mean self-improvement, faster work, higher quality output, or fewer errors. It requires that people constantly look for ways to improve all elements of themselves, their work, or the organization.

2. TEAMWORK AND EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT - empowerment and teams are the key elements for this principle. It means moving away from jobs which have very narrow definitions to jobs where teams have responsibility for entire areas or work assignments. Each person has to know something about everybody else's job and the team effort is what gets the job done. Empowerment means giving the employees the authority and responsibility to do their jobs better. Giving them the power to make decisions about their jobs gives them a sense of control and commitment to doing a better job.

3. STATISTICAL THINKING - this doesn't mean that everyone will be required to be a math wizard. It simply means thinking about work in terms of averages and also the relatedness of each person's job to all others. It means thinking about samples and making inferences about the whole process—understanding that how well you do your own job directly affects how well the organization achieves its goals.

4. PROCESS, NOT PRODUCT - this principle means that the focus needs to be on how things are produced or services are provided instead of on the product or service itself. If we can improve the way the service is provided (improve the process), we can generally improve the end result. If we concentrate on quality work all along the line, the end result is bound to be better.

5. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION - this simply means that everyone in the organization must focus on satisfying the customer rather than simply doing their own little job. Each person needs to see his or her job in terms of how it will affect customer satisfaction, and then needs to assume individual responsibility for providing that satisfaction. Keeping this in mind changes the way people make decisions about their jobs, because the priority changes from local to global concerns.

Managing Time

Managing your time and staying organized are the essential ways of making sure you succeed as a supervisor. Your attitude is important in managing your time effectively. You might try to think about your job as just another project which you are trying to keep going and get completed on time. The following suggestions are designed to help you use time well and keep on top of your commitments as a supervisor.

- **Keep a calendar.**

  A calendar is your first method of time control. It allows you, in one quick glance, to get a clear picture of what you need to do in weeks to come. Keep the calendar where you can see it easily. Enter meetings, notes, questions, deadlines, days off, and whatever else you need to keep on track.

  You may also want to keep a small pocket calendar which you can take to meetings or which you can use when you are away from your work area. This will save time when you try to coordinate achedules with other people.

- **Keep a daily "to do" list.**

  Keep a "to do" list every day and keep it with you. A "to do" list is a simple list of things you want to accomplish during the day. Keep this list with you during the day. Cross out items when you complete them; add new items when you think of them. The advantage of keeping a daily list is that you don't have to rely on your memory to remember what to do next. It's on the list.

  It may help to prioritize items on the list if it is getting too big. For example, put an A next to the things you have to do today, a B next to the things you have to do this week, and a C next to long-term projects. Then you'll know that you are handling the critical things first.

- **Use your time well.**

  Use odd minutes during the day. Anticipate when and where you could be forced to wait. Carry materials with you. Five minute blocks can't replace concentrated time, but they do add up. Take some memos or reports you have to read. Take a notebook to jot down ideas or sketch out plans. If there will be a phone available, consider returning some phone calls or staying in touch. Look at your "to do" list for ideas of what can be done.

- **Keep track of projects**

  Follow through is important. Keep track of your projects from the moment they begin until they are finished. If someone asks you to solve a problem, begin by making a note. Add notes as you work through the problem. Make notes on what you need to do to get the problem solved. Open a file on big problems. When you solve the problem, let your supervisor know, either orally or in writing.

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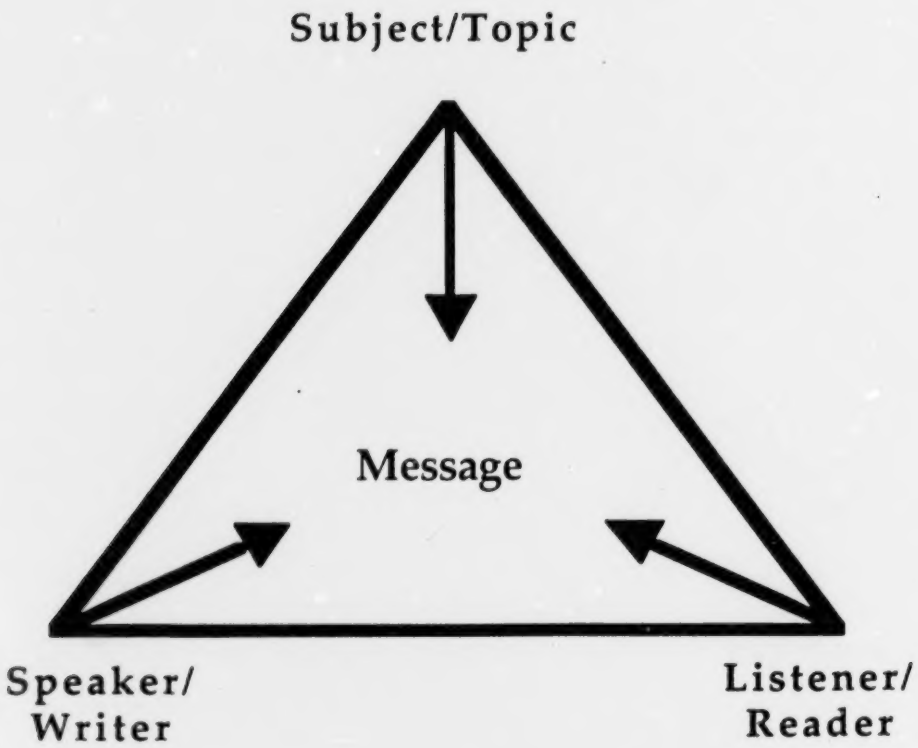
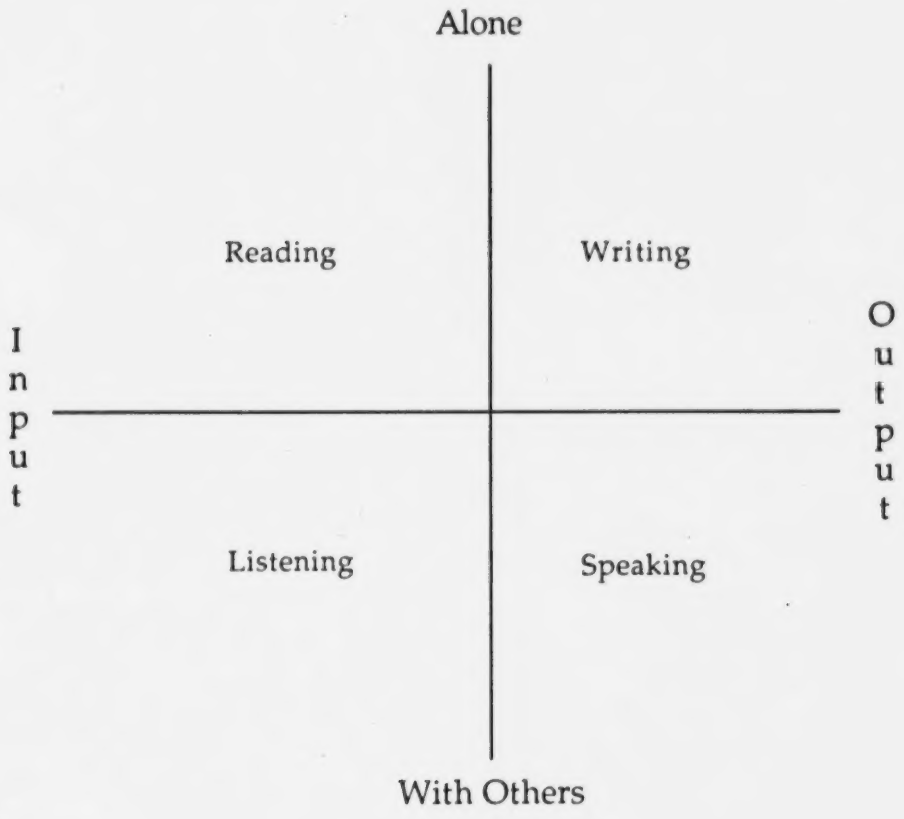
The Communication Triangle



Communication Skills



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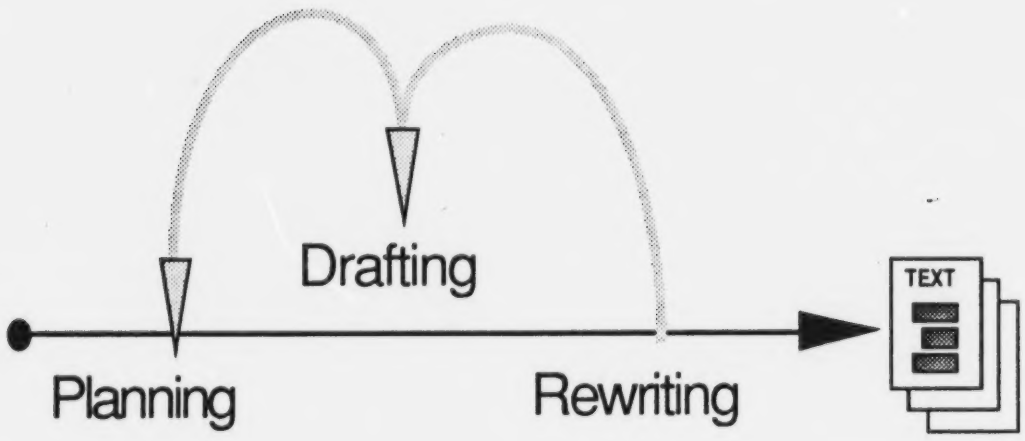
The Writing Process



Purpose and Audience Worksheet

Use these questions to get a clearer picture of your audience and your goals for communicating.

Purpose:

- Why am I communicating?
- What do I want my audience to do?

Audience:

- Who is my audience?
- What does my audience know and how does my audience feel about this subject?
- How will my audience use this document?
- What is my audience's style? Should I adjust to it?
- If my audience were to forget everything else, what one key point do I want remembered?

Strategy:

- Should I discuss this now or later? Should I write or call? How about talking over lunch or after work?
- Should I include deadlines and list any requested actions?
- Am I too late or is someone else communicating this same information?

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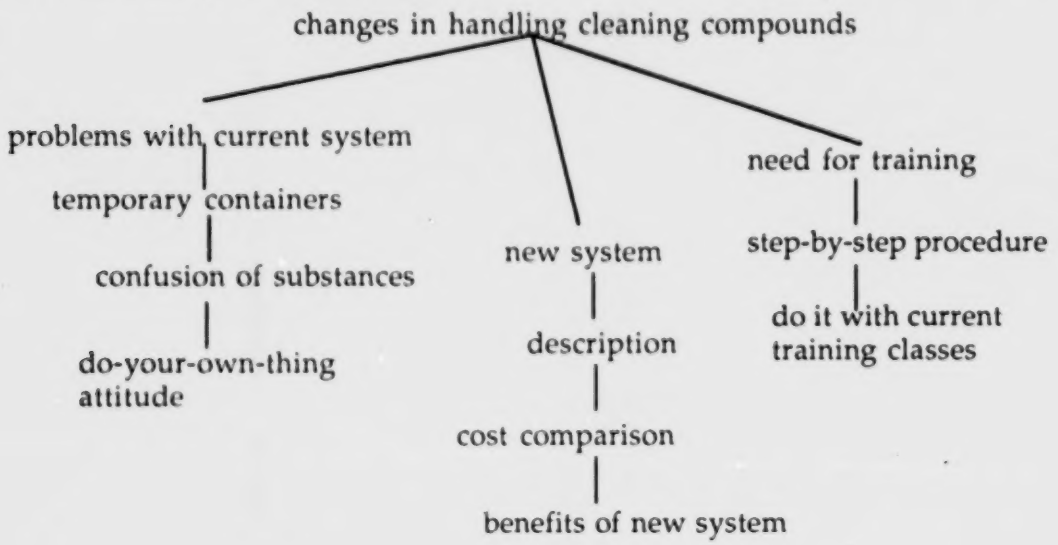
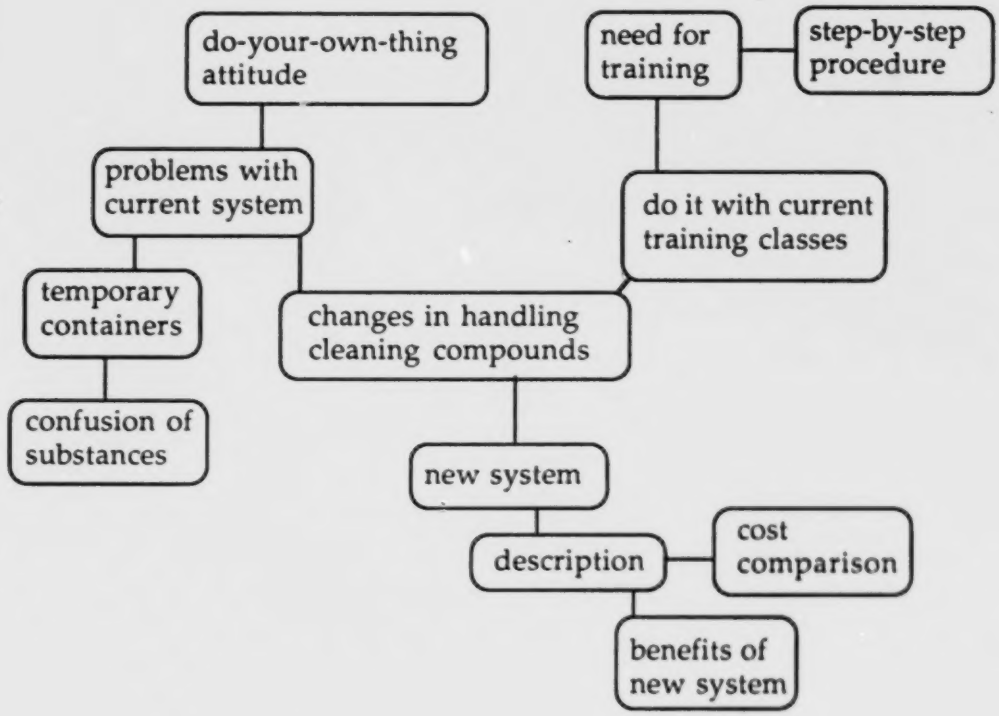
Some Planning Strategies

1. **Brainstorm your topic**: List as many possible ideas, approaches, examples, and strategies as you can. Don't censor yourself--let your writing flow uninterrupted. Then sort and find the good stuff.
2. **Identify Keywords**: Try to identify a single word--a cue or a rich bit--that really captures your problem, your topic, or your task. Or write the headline for your piece of writing.
3. **Imagine different readers' responses**: What would my boss say about this? What would my husband say? What would Sally in the Emergency Room think about this?
4. **Nutshell your topic**: Describe in a sentence or two the purpose and audience of your memo or report. Try to think in terms of *action*--what it is you want to happen. When you state the purpose, state both your purpose and your reader's purpose.
5. **Establish operators**: Don't just state your purpose, but state how you can achieve it. Instead of simply thinking--"I want some help with tuition so I can take some courses"--think *goal* plus *operators*: "I will use the procedures in the policy manual to apply for tuition reimbursement to the personnel manager so that I can afford to take courses in radiation technology at the community college. The courses will be approved because the hospital is likely to need more radiation technologists."
6. **Tree your topic**: Draw an upside-down tree structure that shows what your intend to say or demonstrate.



7. **Cluster your topic**:



8. **Use creative thinking strategies**:
   - Use metaphor or simile: "Getting physicians to sign the orders is like..."
   - Use another language: How would an accountant describe the situation? Or how would an engineer look at this? Or what would an elderly patient say?
   - Examine your subject from different perspectives: How has it changed over time? What is it like? What would it have to have to be something else? What system is it a part of?
9. **Talk about your situation**: Often, just talking about your writing will suggest an approach.
10. **Let your topic simmer on the backburner**: If you can't decide how on a plan for writing, go on to some other activity. Your mind is perfectly capable of working on a problem in the background.
11. When all else fails: **mumble to yourself and stare out the window**.

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Drafting Strategies

1. You might start by putting your outline on paper or on a computer screen with space left between the entries proportional to the amount of text you think each entry will require. Then try grafting your text onto the outline. The outline provides the skeleton for fleshing out your text; so when you get blocked in one section, the outline can serve as a reminder of other sections to work on.
2. For shorter documents, try to get your whole draft done in one sitting, as quickly as you can. For longer documents, see if you can complete a whole section at one sitting. Remind yourself that you're not after perfection, but a quick first draft.
3. Start writing the part that you feel you know the best. There's no obligation to start at the beginning; in fact, the introduction is often the *last* thing you should write. After all, how do you know what you're going to say until you've said it?
4. If you are writing in one section and get an inspiration for another section, quickly jump to that section, write yourself a brief note (I surround mine with square brackets so I can easily search for them later), and then jump back to where you left off.
5. Force yourself to keep going forward, not backward. This is hard, but if you can kick that editing demon off your shoulder while you draft, you may be able to keep up with the composing voice that dictates what to write. (It tends to shut up when the editing demon takes over.) You'll be surprised by how much you have to say about your topic.
6. When you get blocked (and we all do sometimes), try jumping to another section and begin drafting there. (Remember those bracketed notes you left for yourself?) If that doesn't help, go back to the top of your document and read down through what you've already written. That often gets the creative juices flowing again.
7. If you're still blocked, you might seek out a colleague and tell him or her what you're trying write. You will often talk through the block, and find yourself saying *exactly* what you want to write. It's often a good idea to bring a tape recorder to these sessions to capture your words.
8. If you are still blocked, put the project aside and work on something else. Your mind is perfectly capable of working on the back burner to solve a problem while working on another project at a conscious level. Ideas for the blocked project will come as it simmers on the back burner of your mind.

Revising and Editing Checklist

Revising

- ❒ Is my purpose clearly stated?
- ❒ Is the tone right for my intended audience?
- ❒ Have I included the right amount of detail for the level of understanding I want my audience to have?
- ❒ Is the most important point at the top of the document, or is it strategically placed?
- ❒ Do I request any specific action?
- ❒ Is the overall document organized logically?
- ❒ Does the text flow smoothly from section to section?
- ❒ Is the text visually appealing? Is it inviting, or does it look forbidding?
- ❒ Do I make good use of figures and tables to support my main points?

Editing

- ❒ Have I written complete sentences (not fragments or run-ons)?
- ❒ Do my subjects and verbs agree?
- ❒ Am I using active voice? Do I make it clear *who* is doing *what* to *whom*?
- ❒ Am I consistent in the use of tense, number, person?
- ❒ Have I used correct spelling and punctuation?

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Strategies for Quick Writing

Sometimes you have to complete a piece of writing immediately. When speed is the problem, organization is the solution. On this page you will find three methods that can help you write under pressure. Remember that the reader should always leave your memo or short report knowing what to do.

The Inverted Pyramid

This journalistic method works for many people. The trick is to list what needs to be communicated and then order it according to importance. Informed readers can then scan the document from top to bottom for the information they don't already have, while less informed readers can read the entire document.

- List the information you must cover from most important to least important. Eliminate all unnecessary information.
- Start writing the most important information and work your way down the list
- Keep your paragraphs and sentences short and snappy.
- Insert headings where needed.
- Proofread.

The Question Outline

People who do quick research often rely on this method to shape their notes into simple reports. All you have to do is write a paragraph or two in answer to each question. But be careful, since this doesn't work for every piece of writing you do. In the right situation, it can cut writing time considerably.

- Write the answers to the questions that apply to your task: Who? What? When? How? Why? So What?
- Shuffle the paragraphs into whatever order you feels makes the most sense.
- Add any necessary transition sentences.
- Keep your paragraphs and sentences short and snappy.
- Insert headings where needed.
- Proofread.

Three stage outline

This is one of the easiest ways to avoid the chronological or "then-this-happened-and-then-this-happened-and-then-that-happened" trap. It is sometimes tempting to communicate the entire history of an incident and neglect to organize the information to help your reader. This method can help you avoid that habit.

- Start the document by stating the problem. Label the section, "Problem" or "Problem Description."
- Spend a paragraph or two catching the reader up on background information. Label the section "Background."
- Suggest a solution or notify the reader of the action you have already taken. Label the section "Recommended Action" or "Action Taken."
- Keep your paragraphs and sentences short and snappy.
- Insert headings where needed.

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What is Active Reading?

Active reading is effective reading. The active reader:

- Reads with a purpose.
- Adjusts reading style to material.
- Recognizes the main ideas the author presents.
- Focuses on actions and important facts; skims over less important material quickly to save time.
- Tries to understand the sequence and organization of the ideas presented.
- Questions and argues with the text.
- Predicts what's coming.
- Evaluates the reliability and authority of the author.
- Recognizes the author's point of view, intentions, and style.

Are you an active reader? How would you describe your own reading style?

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SQ3R: A Method for Active Reading

SQ3R is a proven technique for active reading. It is designed to make your reading more effective and more efficient.

SQ3R = Survey–Question–Read–Recite–Review

Survey Before you start reading, skim or survey the material. Look over a memo or report for a few minutes before studying it in depth.

- Read the title or subject first to get an idea of what the material is about.
- Look at headings and subheadings. They can help you get an overall picture of the author's plan.
- Look at charts, pictures, graphs, and other illustrations. Read the captions under each.
- Quickly scan introductory paragraphs, and summary sections. They can give you a sense of the big picture.

Question Think up questions that you would like the memo or report to answer before you start reading.

- What is this memo or report about? What is the main theme? How does this material relate to my work area?
- Turn the headings and subheadings into questions that you would expect the section to answer.
- Ask yourself whether you know the answer to these questions when you finish reading the section.

Read Read the material.

- Read the introductory paragraphs carefully.
- Read only the material covered under one heading or subheading at a time, looking for the answers to your questions.
- Read ideas, not just words.
- Spend more time with material that seems more important and go quickly through material that seems less important.
- Keep asking yourself "What is the author's main purpose in writing this material?"
- Read aggressively, with the intent of getting answers, of noting supporting details, and of remembering.

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Recite Tell yourself or someone else what you just read.

- Summarize for yourself what you've just read: "OK, when you're dealing with a new procedure, the most important things to remember are a, b, and c."
- People who spend 25% of their time reading and 75% reciting remember much more than students who spend all their time reading.

Review Review the material.

- Look over the material one last time and get an overall view of the main points.
- Recall subpoints under each main point.
- Write down key information you feel you must remember on a separate sheet of paper or note pad.

Success with SQ3R

SQ3R may seem difficult at first, but it's really a common-sense approach to active reading. When you have used SQ3R a few times, it becomes easy to do; and after a while, it becomes a habit that you don't even have to think about.

What results can you expect if you read or study by using SQ3R?

- You will learn to pick out the important points quickly.
- You will understand difficult material better.
- You will be able to remember more of the material longer.
- You will be able to predict questions or problems which may arise.
- You can review your notes quickly and easily without going back to the text.

Active Listening: How to Hear

Active listening is real listening. It means working to hear, understand, and care about what the other person is saying.

Active listening has several goals:

(1) to help you understand the problem or situation quickly
(2) to respond to the other person's emotional needs
(3) to show the other person that you care and that you hear
(4) to get the other person to cooperate with you
(5) to hear what is not being said (to *hear* between the lines)

We tend not to value listening because it seems so ordinary and easy. *Everybody knows how to listen,* or so we think. But that is not really true. The most basic fault that most of us have is doing (1) above but ignoring (2) and (3). If we have a job where we often come across the same problems day after day, we may quickly figure out what a person needs, what forms they need to fill out or where they need to go. But if we don't let the other person know that we have heard them and emphathize with them, they may not be satisfied with the conversation. And if they're not satisfied with the conversation, they may not be cooperative. In other words, if you ignore (2) and (3), you probably won't be successful at (4) and you'll never get to (5).

It is important to listen with the proper frame of mind. Try to be open-minded and avoid arguing or disagreeing with the speaker. Try to see the situation from the speaker's point of view.
Take a look at the following ideas. These are principles that underlie good active listening. Observe yourself next time you listen to someone. Do you follow these suggestions or do you need to practice?

Concentrate on listening

Try not to let your mind wander. It takes concentration to listen. Use your body—your posture, your eyes, your hands, and your face—to show you are really listening.

Clear your mind of barriers

Certain behaviors make communication very difficult. If you are in conversation with someone you dislike, there is a strong tendency to react by not listening. In some situations, you may be too ready to blame other people in the hospital; in others you may want to rush to the defense of your co-workers. Preconceived ideas can really keep you from hearing what is being said. To communicate well, you need to monitor your own reactions and guard against becoming defensive or critical.

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Don't be put off by emotional words or ideas

Strong emotions can be frightening, and there are lots of strong emotions in a hospital. Strong emotions can interfere with solving problems. Let people express their emotions before getting down to business.

An employee may want a problem solved, but she may also want to express her frustration. If you let her vent her frustration for just a moment, she can then attend to the problem. If you try to ignore her emotions, she feels like her needs are not being met. She may keep trying to get you to acknowledge her frustration instead of moving to a solution. Even if you manage to solve her problem, she may go away unsatisfied because she feels like you did not really listen to her.

When you do understand how others feel—show them. Voice your empathy by saying something that shows you recognize and appreciate the person's feelings. Some examples include: *I understand, I would be upset too,* or *How upsetting.*

Don't assume

It's easy to assume that you know the answer to a question or the solution to a problem before the employee even gets it out of her mouth. After all, you've heard it all a million times, and supervisors are supposed to answer questions and solve problems. This is a sure way to get into trouble. Don't assume you know what someone wants—listen for new information.

If you are not sure you understand, be sure to ask questions to clarify. When you think you do understand, paraphrase what the other person is saying and watch for her confirmation. Then be sure you understand what she wants. You may not have to solve a problem or give an answer— sometimes just listening is all that is needed.

Listening to Understand People: Empathy

To understand someone, you must have some sort of relationship with him. You don't need to know his life story, but you must have some type of rapport.. The more closely you listen to him and put yourself in his place, the better you will be able to communicate and effectively solve the problem.

The first step to understanding is to empathize with the person. Empathy is showing that you understand a person's situation and that you care. It is imagining what it would be like to be in someone else's place.

Empathy is most effective in communication when you demonstrate it in words, by your body language and by your tone of voice.

A hospital is a double threat to all those who walk through the doors and roll out. Their physical health is in danger and so is their pocketbook. By the same token, being an employee in a hospital is doubly difficult. Employees must be concerned not only about doing the job their supervisor wants done, but they must also keep the patient's concerns in mind. As a supervisor, you need to keep this in mind when you listen to your employees.

Here are some tips to help you do just that:

Put yourself in your employee's shoes

Employees in hospitals frequently feel like they don't have much control. They feel that they must serve two masters, their supervisor and the patient. It can be confusing to try to balance the two. It can also be emotionally challenging to deal with some of the situations which come up, especially when they concern life and death where we have almost no control. Try to imagine what your employee is dealing with, and listen with that in mind.

Show that you care

Sometimes the best response is just to say you understand what the empoyee is going through. Try a statement like: *It sounds like you are frustrated..*

Be aware that anger sometimes hides fear

When people are feeling out of control or frightened, they may hide it with anger. They feel less vulnerable. Next time someone is yelling at you or being unpleasant, think about that. Is that person trying to compensate for his fear? Try to help the fearful person inside; don't get caught in yelling back.

Don't get defensive

Nobody likes to be attacked. Our automatic response to criticism is to get defensive or counterattack. Unfortunately, once we respond defensively,

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we are apt to lose the opportunity of gaining the other person's cooperation. If you can avoid taking critical language personally, you will be able to communicate much more effectively.

Don't push back

Sometimes it is useful to think of a conflict as two people shoving each other. The harder one pushes, the harder the other one pushes back. So the conflict keeps getting bigger. If one of the people who is shoving simply refuses to shove, if he just steps back out of the way, the other person has nothing to shove against. Then the shover has a decision to make. It is not very satisfying to push someone who refuses to push back, and it is an awfully good way to fall down. Refusing to push back can help keep a problem from getting bigger.

Listening to Understand the Situation: Paraphrasing

Problems are difficult to solve unless you understand a situation as well as the other person. Paraphrasing is an excellent way to get information about the situation. It is an excellent way to get the meaning from a situation rather than just the surface words or emotions.

When you paraphrase, you repeat or rephrase what the other person said. Like empathy, it strengthens your relationship with the other person. It also helps confirm whether you understand the situation fully.

If you rephrase your employee's comment correctly, the employee will generally confirm it. If you are wrong, the employee will let you know, either verbally or through body language. Paraphrasing is a good way to check your understanding of a situation.

Learning to paraphrase is a funny thing. Paraphrasing comes naturally to some people, but when they try to use it consciously they may become confused. Other people feel uncomfortable repeating another person's ideas because it sounds patronizing. This is seldom the case. People like to be understood. Paraphrasing is a good indication of understanding.

There is no simple formula for paraphrasing. A good paraphrase can be a question or a statement. In the early part of a conversation, paraphrasing is like empathy: it helps solidify the bond between you and the speaker by concentrating on the speaker's feeling. The best way to practice this type of paraphrasing is to identify what emotions the patient is feeling. Answer the question: *What is this person feeling?*

Paraphrasing also helps you get information about the situation. By repeating the gist of what the person said, you can confirm that you understood and encourage her to talk more. It might sound like this: *So what you've said is . .* or *Do you mean*

Here are some more guidelines for paraphrasing.

Repeat the essence of what the person is saying

Employee: *I'm very angry about what happened yesterday.*

Paraphrase: *You sound angry. What made you angry?*

Use language similar to what your employee uses

If the employee says that she is really, really angry, it isn't a good idea to answer: *My, what excessive perturbation.* It sounds like you're making fun of her by using fancy language. Try and match her words: *It sounds like you're really mad!*

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Match your employee's intensity

While we don't recommend that you yell at an employee, if you can match the intensity of her emotion, the employee will feel like you are listening closely. If she comes in yelling about how furious she is, she won't take you seriously if you answer with: *It sounds like you're a little upset.*

Don't move too fast. Ignoring emotions may anger your employee

Nothing increases anger faster than having it ignored. The following conversation would *not* be very productive.

Employee: *I am very angry with the way you are treating me!*

Supervisor: *You look upset. Would you take a look at this memo please.*

The employee will get even angrier because she feels like she is not being listened to. It is better to paraphrase and stop. Let your employee respond to what you said.

Deal directly with strong emotions

It is not always comfortable to deal with strong emotions, particularly if you're not directly involved in the situation. When someone is depressed or angry, we often want to leave her alone. Sometimes this will be appropriate, but sometimes it is best to talk about it. Acknowledging the emotion can open up communication. Here are the sorts of things you might say:

You're really mad, aren't you?

It's difficult to be dealing with patients' families, isn't it?

I'm sorry you lost your daughter to a killer bee attack, your husband's divorcing you, your son joined a heavy metal rock band, and your mother ran off with the TV repairman. How's your dog?

This has been a frustrating day for you.

Use Direct Questions

It may feel uncomfortable to face the situation head on, but direct questions are the best way to get the information you need. You won't put ideas in the your employee's head by asking anything.

The secret of asking direct questions is to be empathetic. You could sound uncaring or frightening if you ask: *Don't you realize what you are doing is dangerous?* If you show that you care about the employee the results can be useful: *I'm concerned. It seems that like you don't want to succeed. What is going on that makes you so depressed?*

Body Language

Some of the most important communication takes place without words–through your body language. Using open body language, nodding your head or saying "uh-huh," reassures the speaker that you are listening. Closed body language, like folding your arms or looking at the clock, can make the speaker feel shut out. It is also important to remember that body language can mean different things to people with different cultural backgrounds. But the important thing to remember is that you are always communicating, even if you are not saying anything.

Here's a list of body cues. Think about which ones you use.

Open

1. Facing the speaker instead of sitting at an angle.
2. Leaning toward the speaker.
3. Smiling or showing the appropriate expression.
4. Mirroring the speaker's body language.
5. Maintaining a comfortable body posture.
6. Nodding your head.
7. Keeping the right distance between you and the speaker; 3-4 feet for interviewing.
8. Animated facial expression.
9. Making eye contact.
10. Touching the speaker, if appropriate.

Closed

1. Being poker-faced or showing no facial expressions.
2. Leaning away from the speaker .
3. Avoiding eye contact; looking around the room.
4. Being too close or too far away from the speaker.
5. Folding your arms as if to shut out the speaker.
6. Tapping a pen or pencil.
7. Looking at forms, writing or engaging in any other activity while the speaker is talking.
8. Looking at your watch.

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Behaviors that Shortcircuit Listening

We have been looking at ways to improve your communication skills. Listening closely, empathizing and paraphrasing will help you when you communicate with someone.

On the other hand, your actions can make it extremely difficult to communicate. Your behavior can upset your relationship with the other person. Look at the following examples of behaviors that shortcircuit communication.

Put yourself in the situation and write out how you could respond differently.

Making excuses

Manager: *I am still waiting for those budget figures on supplies. When will you have them for me?*

Supervisor: *Well, I've been really busy trying to get the new person trained and I haven't had much time to make my projections for the next three months, and . . . .*

Yes, but

Worker: *Ok, so you will try to work the schedule so I have off next Friday for my daughter's graduation, right?*

Supervisor: *Yes, I'll try, but I can't make any promises because a lot of people are asking for the day off and I'm understaffed. . . .*

Becoming defensive

Manager: *So it's important that you try to do this procedure this way so we can have consistency, OK?*

Supervisor: *My last supervisor didn't have any problems with my work. I don't see why I can't do it my way as long as I get the job done.*

Ignoring the problem or the other person's feelings

Nursing Assistant *And Mrs. Zelafield in room 314 was so rude to me. She tried to pull my hair when I went to help her take a bath. She called me some nasty names. I don't like to work with her. I'm afraid she's going to hurt me.*

Supervisor: *You still have to give Mrs. Zelafield a bath tonight. She refused one yesterday and we can't have that . . .*

Criticizing the other person

Worker: *I get confused when we do this procedure. Should I do this or this?*

Supervisor: *If you had bothered to study in school, you might know the answer without having to ask.*

Forcing a "win-lose" solution

Worker: *I thought Jim was handling this while I took care of that special assignment for you. I can't get this memo written by tomorrow.*

Supervisor: *You should have thought of that before. You'll have to write it or Jim will have to delay his vacation to get it done.*

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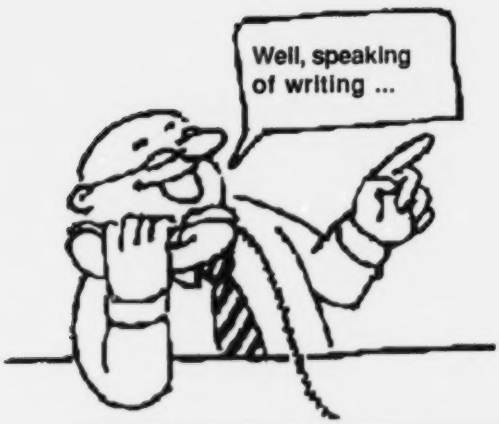
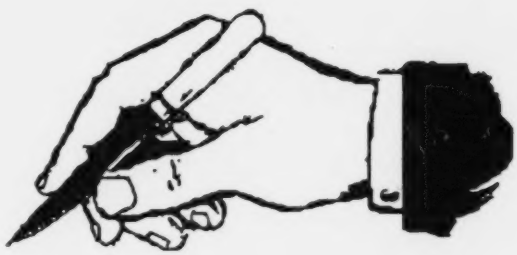
Speaking vs. Writing





How to Discuss

Once you have used your listening skills to understand the other person and the situation, it is time to move to discussing. The goals of discussion are:

(1) to clarify the problem
(2) to maintain the other person's cooperation
(3) to negotiate a win-win solution
(4) to guide the conversation to a close

Discussing, like listening, is not as easy as we think. Here are some skills to keep in mind when you start discussing.

Be open minded

Discussing demands concentration and an open mind. You don't have to know all the answers. Your willingness to be open and explore options makes the other person work with you for a solution, not against you. Modeling good communication encourages the person you're talking with to repay you by being flexible.

Treat the other person with respect

As a health care worker, you deal with the same situations and procedures every day; they seem easy to you. It's obvious to you that Mr. Johnson needs to go to the sixth floor to talk to Medical Records before he deals with you. Being patient and respectful when Mr. Johnson still doesn't understand after three explanations shows him you really care. Respect smooths a lot of ruffled feathers.

Let the other person share in decision-making

In many cases, you may have a clear idea of what needs to be done: either what choice a client needs to make or what a co-worker needs to do in a particular situation. But people like to make up their own minds. When you give Ms. Smits the option of going to physical therapy at 2 o'clock or calling the physical therapist to schedule a different time, you give Ms. Smits some control over her own life. Letting others make decisions is one way you can gain their cooperation.

Be patient

People take a long time to consider possible options. They have to look at the benefits as well as the consequences. Your patience helps keep the person you're talking to from becoming stubborn or confused.

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Create win-win solutions

In tense situations, people are sometimes more interested in proving they are right than in communicating. They may sacrifice the chance to communicate effectively, just to prove how right they are. Blaming others or insisting that they admit they are wrong produces a win-lose situation. Win-lose situations are almost always counter-productive. The other person may admit they are wrong, but you won't have their cooperation or respect.

The best approach is one where everyone wins; everybody gets at least part of what they want. You can create win-win situations in a conversation by being open to the other person's concerns and by giving the other person choices.

Use your knowledge

Your strength is that you understand the hospital system. You know that Mr. Johnson and Ms. Fiel both have to go Medical Records on the sixth floor. Mr. Johnson can go right away, but Ms. Fiel needs another form before she goes there. Save her a wasted trip to Medical Records if you can.

Use "I" language

People are sensitive to language, especially to language which seems to criticize or blame them. A good way to disagree with someone is to use "I" language. You use "I" language when you put your own ideas in context. "I" language implicitly admits the possibility that you are wrong. Even if you're sure you are not wrong, it's a good idea to use "I" language. Other people will usually respond positively to it.

"You" Language	"I" Language
You don't understand this procedure.	I don't think we have the same idea about how this procedure works.
You added wrong.	Why don't we come up with the same number?
You're not listening.	I don't think I've been clear.

Rephrase the following into "I" statements.

1. *You seem to be having trouble with this. Why don't you ask for help?*

2. *You can't do it that way.*

3. *You're hard to work with.*

Open vs. Closed Questions

Discussing is the stage that many health care workers want to rush through. You may be very good at figuring out which options are possible and which ones are not. Whenever people come to you with a problem, your impulse is to rush in and provide the solution.

Unfortunately, people resist when they are simply told what to do. Including the other person in the discussion of options avoids that problem. One way to explore options is to ask the other person open questions. *What do you need to feel better about the situation? How much time can you devote to this assignment without holding up your other tasks?*

An open question is a real question, a question with many possible answers. A closed question is a false question, a question that implies its own answer. Open questions invite the other person to cooperate with you in exploring possible solutions. Closed questions attempt to manipulate the other person. Open questions are the best way to effective and cooperative communication.

Closed question: You better get up to speed on these new procedures. You don't want me to fire you, do you?

Open question: These new procedures are coming on-line more slowly than I thought they would. What can we do to get them implemented more quickly?

Exercise

Evaluate the following questions. Are they closed or open? How would you respond to the question? How would you rephrase the question into an open question?

1. *Nancy, if you don't finish this report by tomorrow it will be reflected on your performance appraisal. You don't want that, do you?*

2. *Miguel, it's very important that you get those supplies delivered today. You can do it yourself or Tim can help you. Which would you prefer?*

3. *Larry, I know you can't complete all those forms today, but why don't you do as many as possible?. Could you complete half of them today?*

4. *Alicia, I'll be disappointed if these rooms aren't cleaned by 4 PM. You don't want to upset me, do you?*

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Improving Performance with Clear Goals

Many employees complain that they are never sure exactly what they are supposed to be doing. Sometimes they even argue that managers are purposefully unclear about directions so they they have reason to fault workers whenever it's convenient. The same employees often claim that their performance is only recognized if they make a mistake; they argue that they can't get better because they never know when they are doing something right. It doesn't matter if the complaints are accurate or not; if employees feel they are adrift in their responsibilities, there is no chance they will be efficient and productive with their time.

The best way to avoid this confusion is to be as clear as possible about what you want. Take the time to explain what you expect; ask questions to make sure the worker understands what's expected; ask the worker if he has any questions or suggestions. As strange as it sounds, improving a worker's performance often means nothing more than clearly expressing your expectations. Most employees want definite direction.

Here are some simple suggestions that will help improve performance:

Set Goals

We know that these suggestions will take some time, but we believe making communication as clear as possible will increase productivity, and save you time in the long run.

1. Meet with each of your workers and decide what good performance looks like in your setting. It's important that both of you are specific.
2. Make a list of goals that relate specifically to improving or maintaining good performance. We feel it is best to write these goals down –the shorter and more precise, the better – and then give the employee a copy.
3. Explain to the employee that you expect him to review his goals every month to make sure that he is accomplishing what the two of you agreed upon. As a manager you need to read your copy of the goals to remind yourself of the agreement.

In order to do this effectively, you have to know what a clear goal looks like. There are three key elements which make a goal good. A clear goal must be:

- Objective and specific - Goals like "Be more productive" or "Write clearer memos" aren't very helpful. Neither you nor your employee will know what you really want done. "Keep your memos to less than one page" is specific.
- Measurable - If the goal is not measurable, there is no way to evaluate whether the employee is making progress or has achieved the goal. "Be able to complete three forms per hour with less than three typos per form within three months" is both specific and measurable. It

contains clear goals and deadlines.

- Achievable - Both you and the employee need to feel that the goal can be reached or there will be no motivation to try. Setting achievable goals involves a careful assessment of the employee's skills and abilities as well as his or her past performance. The most effective goals will be just slightly beyond what the employee has done before. This provides a challenge and a chance to grow.

Review Progress

Both you and the employee need to plan to review progress in achieving the goals on a regular basis. This is important for two reasons: it will let the employee know that you consider the goals and agreement important and are aware of progress of problems in meeting them; and it will allow you to continually review the goals to make sure that they are still appropriate and to revise them if necessary. If the agreement is filed away and only pulled out for the annual performance appraisal, it loses its impact and relevance to daily work. It also is easy for you to forget specifics and to concentrate on other aspects of the employee's performance, and it will be harder to try to remember specifics at review time. Regular review also makes it easier to shape behavior or to coach an employee in what you want.

Acknowledge Success

If you have done the items above well, this will be easy, but it is a critical part of improving performance with goals. You should be lavish with praise for good work, especially when it makes progress toward a goal or finally achieves one. Acknowledging an employee's success is one of the most effective ways you have of reinforcing positive behavior.

Praise in writing is particularly motivating for employees. It takes only a few minutes to type a short note on hospital letterhead. You can then hand deliver it to the employee, copy it to other concerned individuals, and/or place it in the employee's personnel file. Writing a note that praises specific accomplishments demonstrates in very important ways that you value work that is well done.

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Praise People for Accomplishing Goals

One of the things that can be frustrating in a job is feeling that the boss is waiting for you to make a mistake. Positive reinforcement is more valuable than yelling at someone and ruining your own day in the process, so learn to pay attention to people when they do things right. It is especially important to offer praise when an employee accomplishes a goal or demonstrates learning a new skill.

1. Make it a habit to praise people as they are doing a good work. Don't wait until the yearly evaluation when it's a faint memory. It's important to be specific, not just "good job," but something like "I like the way you _____. It shows you are thinking about your work."
2. Get your employee used to the idea that good behavior means being praised regularly. But be careful about overdoing it. Too much indiscriminate praise can become meaningless, just as too little can make people suspicious.
3. Don't be afraid to express how good their behavior makes you feel, and how it helps the hospital accomplish its larger mission.
4. Make physical contact with the employee if it's comfortable. Make eye contact, shake their hand, touch an arm or a shoulder.
5. Write up positive notes for employees' files.

Make them feel good about doing good work. These people will help you look good so don't be afraid to spread some of that around.

Reprimand Behavior, Not People

Just as people need praise when they do things right, they need to know when they are not meeting expectations. Things don't always go as planned and everyone makes mistakes. However, your employee has a right to know that you recognize when he is not living up to his part of the bargain. Use the reprimand as a way to get the employee back on track.

1. Make sure to reprimand the worker immediately. The yearly evaluation is too late. Be specific and don't get personal—the behavior is what is faulty, not the person. As a manager, you are concerned with non-productive behaviors. Make sure that you explain how the behavior makes you feel, or how it keeps the hospital from accomplishing its overall goals.
2. Get your employee used to the idea that bad behavior yields a reprimand. But make it appropriate to the situation. Like praise, overuse of the reprimand can be counterproductive. It sounds like nit-picking and makes the employee feel that he can't do anything right.
3. Allow yourself to encourage correct behavior by praising examples of past good behavior. This is sometimes tough because you will be angry, but it's important to reinforce the pattern that good behavior receives praise, while bad behavior receives a reprimand. But be careful not to send mixed messages. Following a reprimand with praise can dilute the effect of the reprimand and confuse the employee. Keep your purpose in mind.
4. Use the reprimand as an opportunity to reinforce what you see as good behavior. Don't just criticize the bad behavior, but take the opportunity to tell the employee what he or she needs to be doing instead. Use it as an opportunity to coach if that is appropriate. Just complaining will not be productive unless you know that the employee knows what is right, such as getting to work on time.
5. The reprimand is the punishment, so don't start a cold war. When the reprimand is over, don't hold it against the employee. Give him a chance to prove himself.
6. Think carefully about whether you want to reprimand in writing. It is much more permanent and serious than an oral reprimand. If you do reprimand in writing, be very specific about the behaviors and how they can be corrected. Establish some means of checking to be sure the behaviors are corrected within a reasonable amount of time.

You should reprimand less than you praise; otherwise, it will lose its impact on your employees. Remember, a reprimand is supposed to guide bad behavior back to good behavior. Be firm, but gentle. Assume once you've given a reprimand that the problem is over–unless the employee proves you wrong. An employee will respond positively to your confidence.

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Making Assignments

This activity probably occupies one of the largest chunks of a supervisor's time. Doing it right can minimize confusion, maximize productivity, and lead to a satisfied and coherent group of employees. Not doing it right can lead to frustration, inefficiency, and complaints and can waste huge amounts of time. There are some simple keys to being able to do this efficiently and effectively.

Making assignments involves several steps. It is not just a matter of telling an employee, "Hey, Joe! How about delivering these supplies this afternoon." For short assignments or for repetitive work where everyone knows what needs to be done, this may work, but even then it should take some more thought. Things which need to be considered include:

- The nature of the task and what skills it will require; you don't want to give a planning job to someone with poor organizational skills or a writing job to someone with low literacy skills
- The communication style or work style of the person you plan to assign it to; you don't want to give a research or data analysis task to an idea-oriented person or a one-person task with a tight deadline to a supportive person
- The work load of each person in your group; loading more assignments on someone who is already behind will lead to frustration or resentment
- How the task matches the goals you and the employee have agreed are important for him; if you have asked a person to be able to complete more forms in a given time, you don't want to give them a task where they have to depend on others to get them the forms on time, or where forms may be incomplete—they won't be able to do both things well.

Other things which you may want to consider are:

- Can the task be accomplished by a team, with each person contributing special skills or knowledge?
- Can the task be broken down into smaller tasks to spread the work load among the group members?
- Would the task be a good learning experience for a new employee, especially if she worked with an experienced person?

Obviously, you can't and don't need to consider all of these ideas for every assignment you make. But keeping some of the ideas in mind may make your group more efficient and effective in the long run. It will also become apparent to your employees that you are thinking of them as real people with different skills and abilities, and that is a powerful motivation for doing a good job for you. It may be hard to think of these things, especially when deadlines are tight, but even looking back on them later will help to make them second nature to you, and you will find yourself doing these things without thinking about them.

Issuing Instructions

This is a critical part of making assignments, and one which will also help decide if you have a confident, satisfied group or a confused and frustrated one. The keys to issuing good instructions are Clarity and Completeness. If the instructions are not clear, the employee may end up doing the wrong thing or doing the right thing wrong, and neither is effective. If the instructions are not complete, the employee may do too much or not enough, neither of which accomplishes what you had in mind. Here are some ways to make sure your instructions are Clear and Complete:

- Be sure you understand the assignment. If the task is not clear to you, there is little chance that you can make it clear to your employee. Don't make it a job for her to find out what to do. If you don't understand, go back to your supervisor to clarify the job.
- Decide how you want it done. If it is not critical that it be done in a certain way, give some general guidelines. If it is critical, or if you just want to insist on a certain way for a learning experience, spell out the instructions in detail, in a logical, step-by-step way.
- Don't assume the employee understands certain steps or procedures. If you know for sure that he does, mention it and go on. Otherwise, spell out everything in detail. If the task requires following certain policies or safety procedures as a part of the job, don't assume the employee will automatically know that. Say it.
- Be sure your instructions include the whole job. If the final step is to write a report or sign off on a form, say that. If it requires the employee to get some data or get an approval before starting, specify what that is. Don't assume your employee will just know those things.
- Finally, ask your employee if she understands the assignment. Have the employee paraphrase the instructions to make sure you haven't forgotten anything and to see that nothing needs further explanation. When you're both clear on what the job is, get started.

Like the instructions in the previous section, these don't need to be followed completely for every assignment. Keeping them in mind and using the ones which are important, or mentally checking them off as you issue instructions will help make sure your instructions follow the two key points in the introduction.

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Planning and Running a Meeting

Meetings are one of the necessary evils of being a supervisor. Meetings can be either very valuable and constructive or they can be a complete waste of time. Most meetings fall somewhere in between these extremes, but using some simple techniques can help your meetings to be closer to the first than the last. The following notes may provide some guidelines and questions to help in effective planning and conducting of meetings.

- IS A MEETING REALLY NECESSARY?

This is the most important question you can ask. You may find that the problem to be solved can be more effectively addressed through a telephone call, a face-to-face discussion with one or two others, a memo or a letter. If a meeting is not really necessary, skip it. However, at times a meeting may be the most efficient way to solve a problem. Also, regularly scheduled staff meetings, planning or scheduling meetings, or all-hands meetings may be the most efficient way to solve problems or disseminate information.

- IF A MEETING IS NECESSARY, WHAT IS THE TOPIC OR SUBJECT OF THE MEETING?

This question is less important for regularly scheduled meetings such as those noted above, but it is critical for other meetings. The answer to this should be as specific as possible, since it is the key to other questions later on. Being as specific as possible will allow you to limit the discussion to the topic at hand and to avoid unnecessary digressions. It will also allow you to address the next question effectively.

- WHO NEEDS TO ATTEND THE MEETING?

Once you have decided on the subject of the meeting, you can decide who has responsibility for the problem or issue which will be discussed. Include only those who have a need to be involved, not those who may be interested but have no authority to solve the problem or no direct responsibility. You will always have people who have an opinion but no authority to help solve the problem. Exclude them. But be sure to have everyone who does need to be there. If you will need people from other departments to get work done, be sure the appropriate managers are there. If you find during the meeting that someone who is needed has been left out, stop the meeting and get them there or reschedule the meeting.

- WHAT WILL YOU EXPECT FROM THOSE WHO ATTEND?

Be sure that those who are invited to the meeting understand what the subject is and why they are being asked to attend. Be as specific as possible. If they need to prepare, be sure they understand what they need to bring or what they need to consider. Preparation ahead of time will assure that meeting time is used efficiently and that people don't arrive without critical material or information.

Meetings, continued

- WHAT'S ON THE AGENDA?

An agenda delivered sufficiently in advance of the meeting can help people prepare. For regular meetings, this is absolutely critical. Agenda items should have a responsible person assigned to each. Each item on the agenda can be labelled: for information, for discussion, or for decision. If possible, a time limit should be established for each item. These needn't be hard and fast, but they will give you an idea of how well you are sticking to your schedule as you progress.

- ARE THERE ATTACHMENTS THAT WOULD HELP PEOPLE PREPARE?

If there are items which can be reviewed ahead of time, include them with the agenda. Minutes of the previous meeting are a perfect example. Attendees can read and correct them ahead of time, and they can be approved in minimal time during the meeting. Likewise treasurer's reports, written reports on old business or action items, and proposed solutions to items under new business. If schedules are to be reviewed or revised, include copies of the old schedules and/or proposed new ones. The more preparation people can do ahead of time, the more efficient the meeting will be.

- HOW LONG WILL THE MEETING LAST?

Set a fixed time. If the meeting runs over, schedule another meeting. Even the best-planned meetings can uncover unexpected problems or come up with unexpected solutions which may require other resources or people. If you reach that point, summarize the results of the current meeting and schedule another meeting to resolve the remaining issues. Don't continue the meeting without the proper resources or people. You'll just have to redo it. Stick to your time limit.

- CAN YOU STAY ON TRACK?

If your meeting is being run according to an agenda, stick to the agenda. Don't allow digressions. If important topics arise that were not anticipated, schedule a separate or follow-up meeting to discuss them. If they are critical to the topic under discussion, brainstorm them and then schedule a separate meeting. This will allow important discussion to take place, and it will then allow participants to gather data and supporting information for the follow-up discussion. Be sure to complete all agenda items which must be completed.

Meetings can be extremely efficient ways to disseminate or collect information, solve problems, and communicate organizational goals and values. They can also be extremely inefficient, costly and demoralizing if they are not planned and run well. If meetings get out of hand on a regular basis, attendance will suffer and the meetings will become even more inefficient. But a well-planned and well-run meeting will leave everyone with a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of having spent their time well.

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Reviewing The Writing of Others

Being able to review someone else's writing is one of the most important skills a supervisor can develop. One of the quickest ways to learn about writing is to help others, because that forces us to be readers and writers at the same time. You can use these strategies on your own writing, too. Just change hats as you talk to yourself.

Read:

- Read the document once straight through. Don't mark up the writing; just read as if you were a real reader. Stay in touch with how you feel, where you get confused, where you stumble on sentences.
- Read it a second time, this time making notes or checking areas you think need more work.
- Read it out loud if you really want to hear how it sounds.

Check for Completeness:

- Is the purpose clear?
- Does the writer establish connections with the audience?
- Are there enough details?
- Is the document focused and visually attractive?

Feedback:

- Praise two or three specific areas of the document. Don't just say, "This is nice." Go the distance: "This paragraph told me exactly what I needed to know at this point," or "This sentence tells me exactly what I ought to do."
- Use positive language. For example, refer to sections that still need revision as areas to improve, not as problems.
- Try to phrase comments with "I" statements and avoid "you" statements. "I needed more evidence here," instead of, "You really lost me on this one."
- Ask the writer to paraphrase or restate unclear passages. Use questions like "Could this section be stated in another way?"
- Be kind and use your imagination. Remember, you're on the writer's side. Your behavior will convince her of that.

Reviewing Writing, continued

Make sure the writer leaves with a sense of purpose:

- Recap the positive and restate the areas that need improvement.
- Allow the writer plenty of time to ask questions and clear up any confusion.
- If it is appropriate, both writer and critic should set a deadline for the next round of revisions.

When the shoe is on the other foot:

- Don't be defensive; listen to the feedback.
- Don't start explaining: "What I meant to say was . . . ." or "The reason I did it that way was . . . ." Don't bother arguing. Just say "Thanks," or "OK, I understand."
- Ask all the questions you can about the document. It is not unusual to discover solutions to writing problems by talking about them.

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Solving Problems

(The ideas in this section were excerpted from an article in the May 1984 issue of Computer Decisions, which in turn was excerpted from High Output Management, by Andrew S. Grove, published by Random House Inc.)

Solving problems is part of a supervisor's job. Solving small problems will become easier and easier with experience, and in general these can be handled with brief, face-to-face discussions with employees. In many cases, the employee knows there is a problem and is willing to fix it with the proper guidance and advice. But there will be times when it will become apparent that you have a major problem with an employee, and the options are to work to turn the employee around or to terminate him or her. How you handle the problem and the employee may determine which option is exercised.

There are five general steps every conflict resolution process goes through, and these are defined in terms of how the employee deals with the problem. The steps are to: ignore the problem; deny the problem; blame others for the problem; assume responsibility for the problem; and find a solution to the problem. Here are some things to think about and do at each step of this process.

- **Ignoring the problem** - if the employee does not seem to be aware of the problem, it may be because she is ignoring it. In order to overcome this, you will need examples and documentation of the problem to prove that it really exists. Be sure that the examples you choose are clear and unambiguous, and that they really demonstrate clearly the existence of the problem you want to discuss.
- **Denying the problem** - even though it may not seem like it, you will have made some progress when the employee moves from passively ignoring the problem to actively denying it. Again, the key to getting past this stage is to have undeniable evidence to illustrate the problem. It is also important to keep focused on what you are discussing, since it will be very easy to get sidetracked at this point. If this is a long-standing problem, the employee is probably very good at changing the subject or making the problem into something else. Stand your ground.
- **Blaming others** - reaching this point is a significant accomplishment, since it means that the employee acknowledges that there is a problem. He will still deny that it is his problem and refuse to accept responsibility for fixing it, but at least the problem is out in the open. At this point you have some new options which you didn't have before. We'll discuss these later.
- **Accepting responsibility** - this is the hardest stage to reach, since it is an emotional step to acknowledge that there is a problem, it is my problem, and I will have to do some hard work to fix it. It is easy to get stuck at the blaming others stage, and there is no way of resolving a problem if you can't get past that stage.

- **Finding a solution** - once you have gotten to accepting responsibility, this step is relatively easy. You can work together to develop a solution and a course of action that is acceptable to both of you.

It is your job to keep this process on track, know which step you are currently on, and move the employee through the stages to final resolution. Trying to move to a later step before you have gotten through earlier ones won't work. You can't get to a final resolution until you have gotten past blaming others, for example.

When you have gone as far as you can with this process, there are three possible outcomes: one, the employee accepts your assessment and commits to taking action to resolve the problem; two, the employee completely disagrees with your assessment but commits to action to fix the problem; and three, the employee completely disagrees with your assessment and does not commit to any action to resolve the problem.

In general, any solution that involves a commitment to fix the problem is acceptable. Even though it would make you feel better to have the employee agree with you, if it appears that this will not happen, accept the commitment and get on with the job. The acceptance and agreement may come later, and the employee may just need to save face at this point. Let her do that and don't try to force the issue or you may undo the good work you have done up to this point.

Finally, if it appears that you are not going to get past the blaming others stage, you will have to take other action. You will need to assert your authority as a supervisor and get a commitment to action. Acknowledge that the employee is not going to agree with your assessment, and then give instructions for the action which you want. Get the employee's commitment to this action, and then proceed to monitor his or her performance of that commitment.

If you reach a point where it is apparent that you can't even get to the blaming others step, you may have to take more drastic action. At this point, you need to get your documentation in order and talk to the Human Relations department or to your supervisor. Getting counseling, finding special training, or transferring the employee are several options you may have. Terminating a poor performer is not a pleasant or easy job, but sometimes it is the only course of action you can take. Leaving a problem unresolved or keeping a poor performer will just cause bigger problems later and cause you to lose the respect of your other employees.

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Coping with Criticism

The problem with criticism, whether it comes from an employee or a boss, is that hits us so close to where we live: in our egos. We have spent a lifetime creating an image for ourselves; when someone criticizes, they are often telling us that we are not being perceived the way we want to be. So criticism can hurt. But that doesn't mean we can't cope with it as managers.

Criticism is often one of two things:

- a sign that someone needs some attention or reassurance
- good information that can make you better at what you do

The trick is sorting the complaint from the information. Being an active listener during even the most severe critiques will give the critic the attention he needs and give you information you might need as a manager.

Generally when someone is criticizing you or the hospital he is making broad statements that are only partially true (if at all). Your tendency may be to try and prove why he is wrong or to justify your actions. This only adds fuel to his fire. Instead, try directing the discussion with one of the following techniques.

Ask for Specifics

Blanket statements, like "You're being unfair," are hard to answer. You are better off inviting the speaker to be more specific, to focus on what is really troubling her. Then you can start solving that problem.

Patient: *The care in this hospital is terrible.*

Nurse: *Can you tell me how it is terrible?*

Patient: *My room wasn't properly cleaned yesterday and the nurse was in too big a hurry.*

The problem still deserves prompt attention, but it isn't overwhelming any more. Concrete problems can be fixed.

Your attitude is very important here. You have to be open to finding out what is wrong. You may be the one who has to apologize or change behaviors. If you aren't willing to listen, then don't ask.

Staff member: *You're being unfair.*

Supervisor: *What do I do that is unfair?*

Staff member: *You assigned Barbara a day off even though it wasn't her turn.*

The supervisor can be defensive or assert her authority or maybe admit that she made a mistake. Either way, this problem is easier to respond to than broad criticism.

Paraphrase the Speaker's Ideas

Paraphrasing invites the speaker to talk, to get it off his chest and to discuss the problem. It also ends up giving you good information.

Patient: *I can't believe the way you run this hospital. I'll never come here again, even if my life depends on it.*

Nursing Assistant: *You sound upset. Can you tell me the problem?*

Patient: *It's not my problem--it's yours. I've buzzed six times and no one answers my call. This is a hell of a way to run a hospital*

Nursing Assistant: *Ah, I can see why you're upset. You've been trying to get a nurse to help you.*

Ask for Additional Complaints

If you ask for additional complaints in a genuinely caring way, the speaker will feel your concern. Suddenly the two of you are working together; you're not enemies.

Examples:

Are there other ways we could improve our service?

Is there anything else that bothers you?

Is there anything else I should do when I give directions?

Agree with the Speaker

Using this response makes people nervous at first. They're afraid that it means they have to agree when people say bad things about the MMC. Or they are concerned that admitting fault will make the hospital liable.

The secret is to pay attention to what you agree to. You probably don't want to agree if the patient says: *This is the worst hospital I've ever been to.* You can agree with the idea behind it: *It's frustrating when you feel like you're not getting proper care.*

Sometimes you can honestly agree with the whole statement.

Examples:

I suppose I was being defensive.

I guess you're right--my behavior was out of line.

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Coping with Criticism Exercise

Look at the different types of answers are possible for the following example.

Criticism: *Sometimes I think you don't take me seriously. It seems like everything I say goes in one ear and out the other.*

Responses

1. **Ask for specifics:** I'd understand what you mean better if you would give me some example of when I seem to be ignoring you.

2. **Paraphrase:** It sounds like you're mad at me because you think I'm just humoring you sometimes so you'll stop talking. Is that it?

3. **Ask for more complaints:** Is it just my not taking you seriously that's upsetting you, or is there something else too?

4. **Agree with the speaker:** Well, I suppose you're right. Sometimes I don't pay attention to what you say, mostly when I'm tired or mad.

Exercise 1

Directions: Supply an appropriate phrase for each type of response.

Criticism: *I want to complain about favoritism in this department. Ever since Charles starting working here, you've been ignoring the rest of us..*

Responses

1. Ask for specifics:

2. Paraphrase:

3. Ask for more complaints:

4. Agree with the speaker:

Exercise 2

Directions: Supply an appropriate response to each criticism using each type of technique. All techniques might not feel comfortable for all examples, but try.

a. Ask for specifics:

b. Paraphrase:

c. Ask for more complaints:

d. Agree with the speaker

Criticisms

Hispanics employees get treated like dirt around here. If I were an Anglo, I wouldn't get evaluated so hard.

I'm always being asked to translate for patients. How do you expect me to get all of my work done if I'm being interrupted every hour to help someone do their work?

Why can't I ever get a day off when I want it? Elva always gets her way, but you never give me mine.

Why can't you be more helpful? You haven't answered a single one of my questions.

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Problem People

This section discusses you some common types of personalities, how they react in tense situations, and how you can respond to them. Most people are some mix of these characteristics. See if you agree with the strategies for handling problem people.

The Bellower

The Bellower tends to be loud, forceful and very aggressive. She likes to treat people rudely and not apologize.

Reason: Inflated ego. She sees her performance as a reflection of her self worth. If she performs badly, she's not worth anything.

Coping Techniques

- React differently: The Bellower expects people to either bellow back or cower and run away. She is prepared for both of those reactions. Do something she doesn't expect—stay calm; avoid a battle.
- Give her time to blow off steam. She has a lot of emotions to express. Let her vent.
- Sometimes you may choose to stand up for yourself. You can do this by matching the Bellower's intensity and making a strong statement. But don't actually fight with her; she is better at yelling than you are, and a yelling match won't resolve the situation. A forceful statement may slow the Bellower down long enough to get her attention: *I don't want to fight with you. Let's look at this more calmly.*

The Nipper

The Nipper likes to pick at people, to nip at them. He likes to make others look bad. A Nipper may spend the whole meeting saying subversive things like: *Where do you get your ideas? That suit doesn't really look good on you does it? Look how many typos are in this memo...*

Reason: Lacks power. He makes you look bad so he looks better.

Coping Techniques

- Bring the fight out into the open: The nipper counts on the fact that his victims will try to avoid a public outburst Confront the nipping publicly: *Your comments are disrupting the meeting. Do you have something constructive to add?*
- Ask questions—force him to choose between a conversation or a real fight. Ignore the comments and try to get him involved with the meeting.

The Sulker

The Sulker gives people the "silent treatment."

Reason: Wants attention. The Sulker may have hurt feelings or want to talk about something, but she is not a good communicator.

Coping Technique

- Ask questions that require more than"yes" or "no." The Sulker will resist talking. If you ask questions that she must answer in full sentences, she may start to loosen up and communicate with you. A gentle confrontation can be useful here: *It looks to me like you are upset about something. Let's talk about it and...*
- Be persistent and supportive. Sometimes a Sulker wants to be coaxed into talking. You have a choice. You can be supportive and say: *I really want to hear what the problem is.*
- Set time limits on silent episodes. You can indicate that you want to listen, but you don't have time to wait until she is ready to talk. You might say that you only have 15 minutes to talk to her now, but you would be happy to discuss it with her later when she feels she will be able to.

The Prophet of Doom

The Prophet of Doom is always overwhelmed by life. He is sure nothing will work the way it is expected to and the result will be nothing but disaster.

Reason: Lacks power. The Prophet of Doom tends to feel helpless in the face of things.

Coping Technique

- Don't get caught in his negativism. A Prophet can infect others with his gloomy attitude. Don't let him bring you down.
- State your perception of the situation in a nonthreatening manner. Hold on to your expectations of the situation. Simply say: *I can appreciate your concern; I think it will go better than that.*
- Ask "What if . . . ." Prophets don't really have a specific reason for feeling that disaster is imminent. They just "know something awful will happen. . ." Try to help them be more specific. Ask questions like: *What do you think will happen if we do this? Why won't this work?*
- Invite a worst case scenario. Ask them what is the worst possible thing that could happen in the situation. Generally it is not as bad as they think it will be. At least you will have specific objections to talk about.

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The Whiner

The Whiner finds fault with everything. She makes extreme generalizations using words like "everything," "always," and "never." "Everything happens to her." "There is always a problem." "She never likes my work."

Reason: Lacks power. A Whiner feels that nothing can be changed.

Coping Technique

- Listen closely; make her feel important. A Whiner whines because she doesn't know how to get attention any other way. She is accustomed to people not listening to her. Your attention may surprise her enough to make her start working with you to problem solve.
- Remember, she's used to being passive. A Whiner can be frustrating. She is used to not acting; it may take some time to change her behavior.
- Ask her to be **specific.** [See the Prophet of Doom].
- State the facts and go on to problem-solving. Whiners can get caught in feeling sorry for themselves. A statement that acknowledges the facts and moves on to discussing the solution is often useful: *You're right this is a tough situation. Let's take a look a what we can do.*

These are some personality types that you may see frequently. It can help you to know what makes them tick and why they feel like they have to act the way they do. The descriptions are intended to help you understand what motivates some people. Everyone will see bits of themselves in these descriptions. At one time or another, everyone has been the Bellower or the Nipper. And you will probably recognize your friends and family too.

Confronting

There are times when it is necessary to be assertive about a problem with a manager or an employee. When you confront, your attitude is crucial. A confrontation is not a dramatic scene where you point a shaking finger at your rival and yell: *You have done me wrong!* Save that for the movies. The purpose of confronting someone is to acknowledge that there seems to be a problem and that you would like to work with that person to come to a mutually satisfying solution. Here are some ideas that will help you confront constructively.

Identify the real problem

This is the moment where you take one last look at the situation. Is it really a problem you need to discuss or are you trying to make other people responsible for your own problems?

Identify your motives

Be sure you are confronting to improve the situation and not just because you are in the mood to be right. Confrontation is frightening both to the person confronted and the one who is confronting. Be honest about why you are confronting someone.

Describe the problem situation

Your goal is to have the person in a receptive frame of mind so the problem can be solved. Avoid accusing the other person or telling her that the situation is her problem. "I" language can be really helpful here: *I am concerned that...*

Describing the behavior that is problematic is less threatening then making personal comments. A person's behavior is something that can be changed more easily and hence is less threatening to talk about.

Also try to be tentative in your approach. It is less threatening to say: *It seems like there is a problem here.* Instead of: *There is a **big** problem here.* Tentativeness can give the other person an out. She can say: *I misunderstood.* Remember your purpose is to solve the problem, rather than proving you are right.

Being specific is helpful. Avoid saying: *You aren't doing things right.* Try: *I'm not sure these forms were filed correctly.* It gives the two of you something specific to work on. Specific problems also will seem less overwhelming then big general ones.

Be sensitive to the other person's needs

Being confronted is embarrassing; try to be sensitive to the other person's embarrassment. Choose when and how you confront someone carefully and then do it privately. Try for a "win-win" solution.

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Confronting can change the relationship

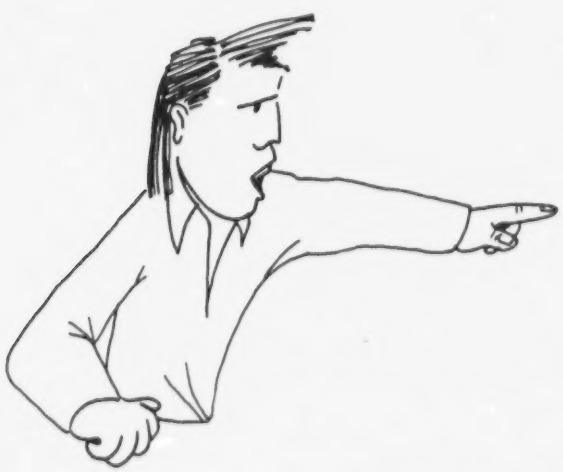
Facing someone with a problem can be a good experience for a relationship. It can help the two of you communicate better in the future. It can also hurt the relationship if the confrontation is too harsh or too threatening for the other person to hear.

Be open to change

It generally takes two people to create a problem. Say you are angry because Nurse Dominguez snaps at you all the time. You snapped back a couple of times. Now the two of you barely speak to each other.

You've decided to confront her because it is affecting the way you work together. In the midst of the conversation, you discover that she is short with you because she doesn't like your attitude. This is a turning point in the conversation. You can answer with: *Yeah, but you were rude to me first!* This will kill the conversation.

Alternatively, you might say: *I didn't realize there was a problem. Can you tell me what specifically you don't like about my attitude?* You may discover it is something trivial like you don't say good morning when you see her (you'd be amazed at how many people complain about that!). Or it may be more serious. To solve the problem, you both have to be willing to change. You may have to start saying good morning even if you haven't had your coffee yet. She may have to be more courteous to you.



Confronting: Practice

Confrontations are not easy. Plan roughly what you want to say in advance so you can figure out nonconfrontational ways to say things. It won't work to say: *Look, no one likes you. Lighten up!* There might be a kinder way to say that.

As you are reading the following dialogue, pay attention to not only what was said, but also how the communication seemed to go. **Then answer the questions that follow.**

Situation: Nurse Gwen and Nurse Cecily have been working together for several months. Nurse Gwen has been constantly rude or patronizing to Cecily. Cecily is sick of it and has decided to confront her.

Gwen: *. . .And try to get it right this time.*

Cecily: *Gwen, I feel that we are having difficult communicating. Have you experienced that too?*

Gwen: *If you were a competent nurse, you might not have trouble like that.*

Cecily: *So, you are concerned about my competence? What has happened that made you feel that way?*

Gwen: *Well, you mis-medicated that patient in Room 318 a couple of months ago, didn't you?*

Cecily: *You're right, I did. I couldn't read the physician's handwriting and I should have called before trying to give her anything.*

Gwen: *Yes, you should have.*

Cecily: *I don't think I've had any difficulty since then. Have you heard of anything I should know about?*

Gwen: *You've got an attitude problem.*

Cecily: *Oh, I'm surprised. Is there something I say or do that tells you that I have a bad attitude?*

Gwen: *It's just the way you talk to me. It shows an attitude.*

Cecily: *Hmmm, I'd like for us to be able to work together more smoothly. Perhaps you can tell me how you'd like me to talk to you.*

(Gwen and Cecily discuss this awhile longer)

Cecily: *You know, Gwen, one of the things that makes it difficult for me to do my best work with you is that we have different styles of communication.*

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Cecily: *Sometimes I am hurt or intimidated when you speak abruptly to me. Last week when you yelled at me in front of the student nurses, I was concerned. That could undermine my authority with them.*

Gwen: *Oh, don't be so sensitive. It is just the way I talk when I am in a hurry.*

Cecily: *I understand that now. I will remember that. At the same time, I would appreciate it if you would remember that it bothers me sometimes. Maybe we can meet in the middle: I'll be less sensitive and you can try to be a bit more sensitive.*

Gwen: *What a pain! OK, if it means that much to you.*

Questions

1. What strategies did Cecily use in her confrontation?

2. Were there other things she could have done?

3. Gwen's attitude was kind of hard to take. How many of you wanted to throttle her? Could you have kept your temper?

4. What would you have done differently?

5. What did Cecily do well? What could she have done better?

6. Did this confrontation disturb you?

Why Do Performance Appraisals?

If performance appraisals are such a stressful experience for both supervisors and employees, we might want to ask why we go through them. Let's look at some of the reasons we subject ourselves to this process on a regular basis. If we understand some of the reasons for performances, we may be able to make them easier and more effective.

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Managing Performance Appraisals

As long as we are going to have to do performance appraisals on a regular basis, we may as well look for some ideas to help us manage them, to make them easier, and to keep us focused on the real purpose. There are five key activities that we need to consider as we develop and deliver effective performance appraisals:

- Gather data and information
- Organize data and plan the appraisal
- Write the appraisal
- Conduct the appraisal
- Plan for the future

Gather Data and Information

Try to see performance appraisals as an ongoing activity, not a once-per-year task. To do so means you need to keep track of what people's goals are, what progress they are making, what successes they have had, what improvement efforts they have undertaken, and what evidence they give of failing to reach their performance goals. You should establish a file and place written notes in it periodically to document the employee's performance over the year.

If you are conscientious about keeping records and documenting performance during the appraisal period, then gathering information to writing the appraisal should be fairly simple. If you have not done that, this step will be more difficult. If you have notes and journal entries, get them together and try to summarize them. Get out your copy of the goals which you and the employee have agreed to and organize your notes around these goals. Jot down any other specific incidents and ideaas which you have that may be appropriate. Get any records and productivity reports which may be of use. This process may take more than one session as other ideas occur to you or you find that you need other information.

Organize Data and Plan the Appraisal

You have already done some of this in the previous step when you tried to summarize the data and looked back at the goals. In this step you will want to become more specific. As you organize your notes and data, you will probably find that certain patterns show up. For example, you may have several notes or incidents about attendance or punctuality along with a goal concerning this. You may have a group of incidents about safety or following procedures. There may be groups concerning productivity or accuracy. Whatever they are, collect these and begin to put them in order of importance, especially as they relate to the goals. You may want to refer back to some of the Drafting Strategies and Planning Strategies which we discussed earlier for help.

Once you have organized your data and decided what is important, you can begin to focus on what you really want to say. Remember that your main purpose is **to improve performance by giving relevant feedback**. Don't try to cover everything in the appraisal. Restrict yourself to two or three main points at most. Any more will just get confusing and dilute the importance of your main points.

Write the Appraisal

This step can take several forms. If you are bound to use a specific hospital form, your data and list of specific events will be valuable in filling out the specific sections of the form. If you are free to use a more general format, you can write from your notes using some of the guidelines discussed earlier. No matter which you do, there are several key points to developing an effective appraisal.

- **Focus on strengths** - praise the employee for significant accomplishments and progress toward achieving goals. Note what the employee does well and how that helps the group and the hospital meet its goals.
- **Be positive** - discuss opportunities for improvement rather than problems to be fixed or weaknesses in performance, unless the problems are so serious that they need to be discussed in those terms.
- **Be specific** - support your comments with specific incidents which show a pattern of accomplishment or need for improvement. Don't make generalizations or broad statements that you can't support. Be sure the incident demonstrates what you are discussing and that it is still pertinent. Refer back to the goals you have agreed to.
- **Outline future expectations and goals** - lay the groundwork for specific actions and new goals for the future, as well as the possibility for promotion, education, training, or additional responsibility if these are appropriate.

It may help to review the Audience and Purpose checklist from earlier discussions as well as some of the writing tips as you actually write the appraisal. Once it is complete, you may want to set it aside for a while and come back to it later for final revision to be sure it says what you really want to say.

Conduct the Appraisal

Your hospital may have a set format for conducting the appraisal. If so, you may want to consider some of these suggestions as additions to the formal procedure. If you have some flexibility, you may want to use these ideas to improve the process. In either case, they will help you to think about the process.

- **Allow the employee time to prepare for the review** - if possible, you may want to give the employee the appraisal some time before the face-to-face discussion. After all, you have had time to prepare, so it seems only fair to let the employee digest the appraisal and collect his thoughts ahead of time. At the very least, sehedule the appraisal ahead of time and be sure the employee knows what to expect

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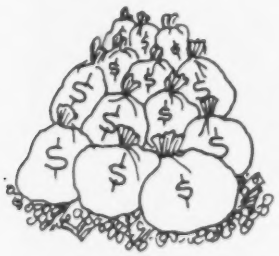
- **Treat the appraisal as a discussion or dialogue, not as a monologue**. This should be an exchange of information rather than a one-sided "report card" type of presentation. You want the employee's feedback and comments so that you both can feel that the process is productive. You want the employee to be able to share feelings, to explore options, and to agree on actions.
- **Maintain your focus** - this may be hard to do if you open up the format to a discussion, but one way is to limit the areas to be discussed at the beginning of the appraisal. It is easy to get side-tracked, especially if you are covering areas which may be hard for the employee to deal with, but resist the urge to change the subject. You may want to refer back to the ideas under How to Discuss, Praising, Reprimanding, Solving Problems, and Confronting for some useful ideas, depending on what you anticipate happening.

Conducting the appraisal may seem to be the most stressful part of the process, but if you have done your homework and planned ahead, it will be the most effective way to present job-relevant feedback that you have, and it can provide a unique opportunity to build stronger relationships with your employees.

Plan for the Future

While much of the review process seems to be focused on the past, it will be much more effective if you consider spending at least half of your time discussing the future. This is of primary interest to the employee, and it should be to you, too. Set a specific time to discuss reviewing, revising and creating new goals. Discuss the possibility of training, new opportunities, promotions, and other things which may be important. Let the employee know that improved performance can result in these other outcomes and decide what is important to the employee. Let the employee know what will be expected in the future and how performance will be evaluated. The more open the communication is, the more effective it will be, and the more the employee will feel in control of the factors which affect his or her future. Feeling in control will lead directly to a willingness to commit to improved performance to achieve future goals.



Communicating in Health Care Settings

Certainly, the content of communication is important in health care. To some extent, good communication relies on accurate information, competent explanations, and clear directions. But more important to good communication are the relationships that are established as we talk with each other. We don't just pass ideas back and forth. We work to build and maintain relationships with other people. How we say things continually contributes–in either negative or positive ways–to the relationships that we build through our words.

Let's consider here some of the facts of hospital life that make communication difficult. As you read, try to think of situations in your particular work situation that you are reminded of. Take the time to make short notes (in the margin or elsewhere) that either support or contradict the points made in this discussion.

Hospitals are tense places

We should never lose sight of the fact that hospitals produce tension and anxiety in those who work there. Illness is present, as is death. Dangerous chemicals and equipment are present. People must constantly make important decisions about what to do and how to do it. Risk, exposure, and liability color conversations. Everyone knows that good intentions are not sufficient to protect oneself from lawsuits or self-doubt. These aspects of the hospital setting mean we must be careful about what we write or say. Emotions must be guarded and words carefully measured. Uncertainty must sometimes be hidden, and language must always be used carefully.

Nor should we lose sight of what hospitals do to those who arrive for treatment. Patients made anxious by disease are made uncomfortable by unfamiliar surroundings. People who are accustomed to being in control must surrender control to a large group of unknown specialists. Patients are stressed by being in the hospital, weakened by disease, disoriented by drugs and treatments. Patients know medical treatment is expensive and that insurance companies are reluctant to pay the full costs. So patients are threatened not only in their health but in their finances.

What happens to communication under such stress? People lose their tempers, they become demanding, and they take out their frustrations on others. They become impatient and uncooperative. Tension and anxiety influence what people are able to hear and how they interpret what they do hear.

The hospital setting is not normal and we can't expect people to communicate in normal ways.

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Hospitals are busy places

Hospitals feel busy–crowded lobbies and waiting rooms, people moving around quickly, paper everywhere, equipment and patients being rolled about. People who work in hospitals feel busy–too many patients to take care of, too many interruptions, too little time to deliver quality attention to patients and to the demands of the job.

Good communication takes time. You need to feel that both of you are relaxed enough to attend to each other. If someone is trying to tell you something, but you have a dozen other concerns on your mind, how can you really listen? Maybe you try to talk with someone, but you sense that person is really too busy to listen to you. Perhaps the person looks at her watch or shuffles through papers or taps a pencil on the desk. All such cues of body language say "Hurry up–I don't have time to listen to your problems." Instead of communicating and building a working relationship, you end up feel ignored or mistreated.

It is frustrating to realize that someone is not concentrating on what you are saying. But it is typical in situations where everybody feels busy.

Everybody gives orders

The hospital is a very task-oriented workplace. Much needs to get done and there are many levels of jobs and supervision to make sure the jobs get done. "Do this" and "Do that," "Get me this" and "Take care of that." All day long, people are giving orders to other people, telling others to do something. And often, the orders are delivered with urgency. It is not just "Do something" but "Do it now!" *Stat*, we say, insistently, in the language of emergencies.

In busy situations with lots of people giving orders, communication may not follow normal rules of politeness. It is common for hospital workers to complain about being bossed around by everyone else. Frequently, workers feel that they are not treated politely and with respect. Part of this is the result of the urgency that characterizes hospitals–there is much to be done and it must be done now. So people may skip saying "Please" or they may be too blunt or too demanding in the ways they use language. They use fewer words, more commands, and a more blunt approach.

We are all sensitive to how we are being treated by others. We are tuned into the little communication signals that convey respect and that demonstrate a good working relationship. When someone else doesn't convey the politeness or respect we feel we deserve, we become offended and perhaps uncooperative. These feelings are normal–they are extremely common in health care settings.

Hospitals are characterized by status, rank, and authority

Think about the levels of authority or status in a hospital workplace. Suppose you tried to draw a diagram of all the supervisors, coordinators, and managers. Suppose you tried to include all the patterns of authority–who gives orders and who receives orders. It would be a complicated diagram.

Hospitals are characterized by a very wide range of status. At one end of the status hierarchy are the doctors. There is probably no job in our society with higher status than that of physician. They have more education and training, and they tend to make more money than others. They are not even real hospital employees; rather, we say they have staff privileges.

At the other end of the status scale are those who keep the hospital running–maintenance and housekeeping, cafeteria and laundry. Many levels of wages and education are represented in the hospital staff–from people who have not finished high school to those who have spent practically their whole lives in advanced schooling.

In a normal day at a hospital, people representing a wide range of status are in constant contact. Where else would you find so many different specializations communicating with each other everyday at work? If you worked in a department store, you wouldn't have all these people of different education, status, and training running around. Status differences are highlighted in health care organizations because so many people of unequal status interact daily.

Our language training and the manners we learn at home and at school tell us to respect status. The rules say to be especially polite, to show respect, as we go up the status hierarchy. In the health care setting, the staff constantly must adjust speech to the wide status hierarchy. This puts a strain on communication, both when status is respected and when it is not. It's a strain, too, because we are taught to observe rules that tell us to speak one way to those above us and another way to those below us. In other words, status forces us to keep creating relationships that are not equal. Our language continually forces us to recognize inequalities in who we are, where we come from, and what we do.

The hospital reflects social divisions of gender, race, language, and social standing

Does the word *doctor* make you think of a man? Does the word *nurse* make you think of a woman? What about *nursing assistant*, or *records clerk*? What about *manager, cafeteria worker, secretary, vice president*, or *security officer*? The divisions of gender–of the roles that we expect men and women to play–are especially striking in hospitals. As you look around the hospital, are there clear tendencies for women to be in certain positions and men to be in other positions? Who manages? Who cooks and serves the food?

When workplaces are biased along gender lines, it tends to stress communication. Health care has always been a field that employs a large

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number of women. And like other workplaces, it tends to reflect the bias of keeping women in lower status, less well paying positions.

When we consider how gender differences affect communication, we need to think about how people are brought up–how they are socialized to behave as men and women. Those who study gender differences suggest that men tend to be independent, they tend to view conversations as arguments, and they tend to dominate conversations and control topics. Women, in contrast, tend to be more sensitive to relationships. Women value intimacy more than men, and they place more emphasis on how people are feeling and reacting as they communicate. Women may assume that the point of a conversation is to explore solutions to a problem; men may assume that conversation is a way of fighting and a matter of winning.

In addition to large percentages of women workers, health care settings tend to have large numbers of hispanics and blacks, especially in the lower paying jobs. The workplace reflects the inequities in the larger society.

In the case of hispanic workers, the difficulties of communicating across cultural groups is intensified because of language boundaries. Languages in contact–for example, the use of English and Spanish in the same workplace (or English and Navajo)–tends to make some people feel included and others feel excluded on the basis of language. People feel left out of conversations and sometimes feel they are purposely excluded. English-only speakers feel that bilingual workers shouldn't use Spanish because it makes them feel left out. Spanish speakers may feel most comfortable using their home language, especially when relaxing over lunch or at break.

Those who are bilingual often feel that English-only speakers don't like or respect Spanish, even though they often need it. Bilingual speakers–from housekeeping or patient care–are often called upon to translate for Spanish-speaking patients. The translators often feel burdened by the need to translate. It disrupts their work and is really not considered part of their job duties. They feel used, because they happen to be bilingual.

The mix of gender, language, ethnicity, and social class will continue to characterize the health care workforce. We will see fewer white men entering the workforce and increasing numbers of women and minorities. These changes will continue to put stress on working relationships and communication. We need to find ways to improve communication across language and cultural groups, and we need to find ways to remove bias and discrimination from the workplace.

The hospital is a high tech workplace

Hospitals are an information-intensive environment where technological change occurs at a dizzying pace. Hospital workers are constantly having to learn how to use new equipment and how to follow new procedures. This means workers must learn from highly technical manuals and read complicated

documents. They must also explain difficult procedures to co-workers and patients.

This technology can be intimidating. Instead of working directly with people, hospital workers are dealing with machinery that must be precisely maintained.

To meet the challenge of this evolving workplace, workers need to be adaptable, which means that they need to have sophisticated reading, writing and oral communication skills.

The hospital is a bureaucracy

The word bureaucracy suggests a complicated organization. Hospitals are bureaucracies–complicated workplaces with many levels of workers, complex reporting relationships, and conflicting purposes.

Bureaucracies threaten good communication. People lose track of who is responsible for what. It becomes difficult to say who has authority for something or how to initiate a change. People become insecure about their identities within the organization. There are too many offices, too many procedures, too much paperwork. Everything seems to detract from one's ability to do a good job.

Hospital staff often feel they are left out of decisions or that they are not informed about what is going on. Within their own groups, they may feel their managers don't share information or that they do not meet frequently enough on a department level. Some staffers complain that they learn what's going on in the newspaper. Others say that no one pays attention to their complaints or suggestions. These are characteristic feelings in a bureaucracy. People feel unimportant, uninformed, or unappreciated.

In a bureaucracy, grapevines tend to flourish. People learn from co-workers about changes in procedures, or job postings, or reorganizations. The grapevine tends to be unreliable, both in terms of the accuracy of information and the consistency with which people learn. Grapevines can't be eliminated, especially in large organizations. Smart bureaucracies take advantage of the grapevine to spread accurate and timely information.

The hospital offers care but must make a profit

When hospitals were community-based, charitable organizations, they could afford to concentrate solely on quality care. Now, however, hospitals must meet conflicting expectations. They must try to balance the demands of quality care with the need to make a profit. They must continue to serve the indigent public and to live within the "reasonable and customary" charges as determined by insurance companies and federal programs.

Many of those who work in hospitals have values that conflict with profit motives. Many choose health care as a profession because of strong desires to help others through quality care. They see contradictions in health care because hospitals are businesses as well as health care providers. Hospitals are

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characterized by tough ethical dilemmas that must balance competing purposes. Who deserves treatment? Who receives the use of what equipment? When do we send patients home? What can we do for those who are poor or uninsured? What is a "reasonable and customary charge" for care that is changing constantly and that is always delivered to individuals with their own needs? What price can we put on helping people become well and happy?

What can we conclude about communication in health care settings?

We can conclude that communication in health care setting is difficult. The hospital is an unusual place and the language, too, is unusual. You will be frustrated and disappointed if you expect people to observe normal rules of polite conversation. Too much is at stake in the hospital setting. You should be careful to distinguish the language that people use when they are in a hurry or under pressure from language that is truly intended to be rude. You can train yourself to be slow to take offense and quick to grant others some leeway because you understand the pressures of working in a hospital.

If you pay attention to language, you can see it as something interesting and challenging. Watch how people behave with language. Notice how people observe status distinctions or cross-cultural communication. Pay attention to how people communicate not just with their words but with their bodies. The hospital is a very rich language environment. Think of it as a laboratory where you can observe and learn about human behavior.

Above all, remember that we are all creating and sustaining relationships as we talk with each other. Most of us want to be respected, appreciated, and liked by others. We want to contribute as part of a team. We will do practically anything for a co-worker if we are asked politely and treated with respect. We share goals for quality care and we normally share good intentions toward each other.

Language is one of the means we use to create a comfortable, productive working community. We should pay attention to how we use language and how to use it better.

Why listening's not as easy as it sounds

Everyone knows good managers are good listeners. So why is it that you tune out at times?

"Even a teeny complaint has a half-life of about 50 years for the person receiving it."

By Nancy K. Austin

I AM about to give a speech to the top 300 managers of a celebrated service company. The executives get together like this at least once a year and look forward to hearing great news: Market share is growing impressively, customers love us, our future is so bright we have to wear shades.

Only this year the story is different. A just-published independent survey of several thousand customers has revealed that the competition is doing it better. On top of that, the whole of the U.S. economy is decidedly southward-bound. This is where I come in: They have asked me to help them return to basics, to tell them what I know about treating customers right.

Just before I go on, they show videotape clips from some interviews they did with a cluster of supervisory employees, a kind of visual attitude survey. Hallelujah, I cheer, they *are* willing to listen—that's one of the basics they have down already. I am impressed by their grit; usually listening is the first thing to go—along with training meetings like this one—when hard times come.

The room darkens and the tape rolls. The first two smiling faces up on the screen keep it short and sweet. The third—what is this? The image has been *scrambled*, even the voice, so that it sounds for all the world like the talking subway trains in the Atlanta airport. Man or woman, impossible to tell. This is pure *Donahue*, as when drug dealers or ax murderers or Mafia informants appear identityless. Instantly, I am paying strict attention, tensing along with everybody else, bracing as for a shock. "Well," says the singsong digitized voice, as little tiles of color move around the screen, "once I called headquarters and had to leave a message, and the receptionist never gave it to the right person."

That's it. That's all we hear from he/she/it. The next subject has something nice to say; her animated face is projected without electronic body armor. All together, seven clips are shown, three of them "Donahued." The houselights come up and I am introduced and give my speech, but those refashioned tapes bother me. What kind of message is management sending when even minor criticisms are treated so gingerly?

After a while a plain but trustworthy explanation occurs to me. Making room for opinions other than our own is heroic work. Everyone knows that even a teeny complaint has a half-life of about 50 years for the person on the receiving end. (So *that's* why it takes so long to get over performance appraisals.) Compliments, according to a similar law of physics, vaporize in 30 seconds flat. Yes, listening is extremely troublesome.

When you say, "You can tell me anything," you make a few promises: "I will listen; I will keep my mind open; I do not take criticism personally; I know your intentions are good." All the same, how well I understand Joan Didion's stark assertion that there is no such thing as "constructive criticism." All criticism is violent.

That must be the reason certain grievances that have come my way over the years still make me crazy. Once, after giving what I thought was a perfectly good speech, a note, folded into eighths, was damply pressed into my hand by a woman from the audience on her way out. "Do something about your hair!" it read. "Look at Jane Pauley; if you wore your hair like hers, it would be a huge improvement." "But what about the speech?" I whined to myself. "Did you even hear the speech?" And that is the eternal burden the loyal listener carries: You may not like what you hear, not one bit.

Listening well is an art form, and we are not talking still lifes. There are certainly more than enough experts on the subject these days. They know that you know that listening is important. But they think you should tune in as never before now that times are tough—and *they* can help you do that. They suggest a brushup on what they call "active listening" (better than the ordinary kind).

There are, you may remember, three main steps: First, indicate that you are really, really paying attention by asking open questions ("In what ways, exactly, Ms. Fernwhistle, do you feel I've been a jerk?"). Next, conduct a few reality checks along the way ("If I understand you correctly, you're saying I'm a sorry excuse for a manager?"). Finally, don't let your mind drift off in the middle, perhaps because you are busy planning your next witty retort ("Oh yeah?").

Although you could rush off to the library now and find at least 74 books to guide you in this noble endeavor, I hope to save you some gasoline and a modicum of trouble by offering my own friendly counsel. (I can tell you anything, right?)

LISTEN BY WANDERING AROUND

Begin with your own staff. When you want to know what's on their minds, give them a break and go to them; listening works better when done

Page 77

in *their* territory. Keep it casual and realize that you will have to make roving listening a habit before anybody truly believes you are serious about it. Consistency is what counts.

When you do go forth to listen, arrive empty-handed, for heaven's sake. Leave your notebook and your Mont Blanc and all other scary armaments behind. This is no fact-finding mission. Think of it as Outward Bound. The point, skilled listeners will confirm, is to build solid relationships and two-way trust, which are all you really need to gain a foothold on just about any corporate wall.

Suppose, however, that in the course of your adventures somebody courageously suggests a nifty idea that you want to remember. Ask that intrepid being if you might borrow *her* pen and notepad, and write her suggestion down then and there.

FIGHT THE URGE TO "SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT"

My erstwhile banker taught me this when I—a client of 12 years—politely announced that I was taking my business elsewhere. What pushed me over the edge was a new bank policy that limited to three the number of questions a customer could ask over the telephone. Apparently we were getting in the way of production efficiencies or something.

The banker's response to my change of heart was swift and disturbing. "Speaking as your financial engineer," he began (big trouble, I knew it), "I think I can solve this problem. We simply need to do a better job of *educating* you." Oh yeah?

He meant that I was making a big mistake, that if I properly understood all the marvelous things the bank had done for me lately, I would realize how ill-conceived my decision actually was. He never asked the important questions, like why I wanted out or what the place might do to improve or how to win my business back. In every bone I knew he could not catch what I was saying. The bank didn't want to listen—and neither did he.

REALLY LISTEN

You will be forgiven almost every misstep but one. A listener must be all there. No sidelong glances, squirming or signs that you are being driven to distraction. If you feel your attention start to go, try asking a couple of new questions, lean in toward the speaker or take the discussion for a short walk. When those fail to deliver the goods, better to admit defeat and pick it up again later. Come to think of it, fessing up to your flawed attention span might turn out better than you imagine: Your staff will realize you are, after all, human. And keep trying—even if at first you don't succeed. The good news is you don't need to fret about getting it exactly right; most people, it seems, respond well to an unpretentious but genuine attempt to walk a mile in their moccasins. As you learn to listen, people will get better at telling you things.

Sometimes distance or delicacy makes it impossible to lend your own ear. Consider calling on an objective aide-de-camp (someone everyone knows and trusts, not a consultant or a moonlighting snoop). I've seen personnel managers successfully deputized for this purpose. What people cannot or will not say to you, for whatever reason, they might share with another respected elder. Other options: Inaugurate a weekly listening breakfast or dream up a suggestion-of-the-week award.

> There ought to be a surgeon general's stamp on this subject. Warning: Listening can make you feel defensive and hostile toward the one you're listening to.

BE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY LISTENER

Some managers lend their ears only to those who occupy higher salary brackets. There are words to describe this tendency, but "listening" isn't one of them. Beware of underestimating talent merely because it doesn't own a pin-striped suit. That fresh-faced accounting clerk you hired yesterday has as much (or more) to offer as the honchos do, but it is a rare manager who tunes in so democratically.

DO SOMETHING ABOUT WHAT YOU HEAR

It's tough enough to buckle down and listen—it's even harder to act on the information you get. But customers and employees alike will continue to suggest improvements only if their ideas are taken seriously, even those you may privately consider undercooked. When a staff member dares to suggest a better way, the courteous—the smart—thing to do is respond fast, say, within 24 hours. Delay and you confirm everyone's worst fears: This is a paper tiger, no teeth; why bother?

So scribble a quick thank-you note. Send a message via e-mail; small acknowledgments carry weight, too. Whatever you do, remember that a sincere, speedy response is what counts.

KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT A DAY

The tricky part is knowing when to stop tuning in and start dropping out. After a short presentation, I asked if anyone had questions, a familiar procedure. A nice-looking man jumped up, brandished a copy of my book, *A Passion for Excellence*, and sniped, "Explain, if you can, how the second paragraph on page 263 of your book squares with what you have just told us" (gotcha!). I let a couple of seconds pass before I replied, without a hint of sarcasm, "I would be happy to, if you would please tell me whether you're talking about the hardback or paperback edition—because, you understand, the pages don't correspond." The applause and laughter made it unnecessary to say more.

Mr. Smartypants wanted to make a statement, of course, and he was less than congenial about it. In assertiveness-training classes they call that a hit-and-run—an appropriate term, I always thought. It took some effort, but I managed to overcome my instant defensiveness (the really hard part) long enough to listen and respond (active listening again).

At the end of the day, listening to people is not so much a matter of studied style as a mark of leadership. Leaders pay attention. Leaders are willing to authorize people to think, and they make that clear by listening. Listening says, You are smart and have important things to say; you are worth my time, go ahead; what a good idea.

Listening is not complex enough for many executives (so they don't do it). In fact, there really ought to be a surgeon general's warning affixed to this subject:

WARNING: THIS ONLY LOOKS EASY.
LISTENING CAN MAKE YOU
FEEL DEFENSIVE AND HOSTILE TOWARD
THE ONE YOU'RE LISTENING TO.

Any way you look at it, "plain-vanilla listening" is anything but. ■

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Page 78

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Good Writing on the Job

The Place of Writing in Business

Writing is important to the health care business. Estimates of the time people spend writing in a normal workday run upwards of 25%. If we count both the time spent writing and the time spent reading what others have written, the figure is closer to 40%. That is a lot of time and it represents a significant business expense.

When we asked people in one of our classes to keep track of all the things they wrote and read during one work week, they started to do it but then quit. They said the list got so long that keeping a log interferred with their jobs. Imagine that you were the accountant for the hospital and that you had to place a value on the writing that goes on. How much would good writing be worth? How much employee time is involved? Working with one hospital, we helped them revise an admissions form. After working with the new form for several weeks, the admissions representatives said they thought the new form saved their group about two hours per day. What is the value of writing well or poorly?

Poor writing is bad business. It slows down the communication process, causes confusion, and encourages mistakes. Most hospitals are inundated with paperwork. There is just too much paper around–reports are too long, memos too frequent, correspondence too burdensome. When the writing is not only lengthy but bad–filled with mistakes, poorly organized, unclear–writing becomes a hindrance rather than a tool for providing quality care.

Individual Writing in Business Settings

Good writing is important at the individual level. The memos and reports that you write serve the interests of the hospital, but they also serve as a primary means of individual evaluation. It may never be stated outright that you will be evaluated on your written reports or memos, but all too frequently, nobody knows what you did until you put it in writing. The impressions formed of you as a worker, especially by higher-ups who are not in your immediate work setting, are often based on what you write.

Thus writing serves as a key means of job evaluation and plays a large role in decisions concerning promotions and merit raises. Writing serves to establish and maintain an employee's role within a company. And the higher one moves within an organization, the more important and time-consuming writing becomes (at least until one reaches the levels of upper management, when oral communication becomes more important than written). Supervisors write more than line employees; managers write more than supervisors.

Yet the importance of writing is often not acknowledged. Most employees feel they spend too much time writing, that their writing is weak in one of a dozen ways, that they really need to brush up on the principles of good writing. Employers will complain that they see weaknesses in the writing of others,

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perhaps lamenting that colleges don't do a better job of training students in essential communication skills. They will also admit that their own writing could be improved.

Many employees do not define themselves as writers or define writing as their work. They see writing as something they have to do but would rather not. They see writing as a necessary evil associated with their jobs. Writing is a foe, not a friendly tool, a tool closely related to success.

The Importance of Purpose and Audience

The real key to good writing is a well-developed sense of **purpose** and **audience**. Good writing will follow once a writer decides exactly what needs to be accomplished and who can accomplish the task. And often, a clear sense of purpose and audience will prevent problems of grammar and word choice at the sentence level.

The worst kind of writing is that which has no clearly defined purpose or targeted audience. You might read a memo and wonder: "Am I supposed to do something? What is this writer's point? Why am I being told these things?" And often, this kind of writing may have annoying errors or variation in word choice that indicate the writer's uncertainty (or even lack of thought) about purpose and audience.

When you shape a piece of writing around a clearly defined purpose and audience, you give yourself a tool for deciding what to include and what to delete, what to emphasize and what to downplay, and how to order your arguments and evidence. A sharply defined sense of purpose and audience will also guide you toward an appropriate strategy and tone. With a clearly defined purpose and audience, you can begin writing to specific individuals with a clear sense of what you would like them to do. You then have a yardstick for editing and revising that lets you measure how well you are communicating your purpose to your audiences.

Multiple Purposes, Multiple Audiences

Most work environments are complicated places, and purposes for writing reflect these complications. A writer will have an obvious purpose for writing, but behind the stated purpose may lie hidden motives of personal advancement, empire building, or efforts to change or influence the organization.

For example, suppose I am a supervisor who has a problem with employees using the photocopier for personal business. If I decide a memo is the best way to handle the situation, this gives me an obvious purpose for writing.

But behind the obvious purpose of stopping unauthorized uses of the machine are other, secondary purposes that make the memo a complicated business. I do not wish to alienate those who haven't used the machine for unauthorized uses. Nor do I wish to make a contest of the problem, challenging people to use the machine without being caught. And I certainly don't want my employees to get

the idea that the office will be patrolled by a photocopy police squad. I would like simple cooperation from my employees; I want them to recognize the reasonable nature of my request to stop using the machine for unauthorized copying. Most writing situations are like this–complicated, multi-faceted, somewhat touchy in their interpersonal complications.

Nor is it a simple matter to define an audience. My memo is directly addressed to those in my office with access to the photocopy machine. Yet there may be other, secondary audiences who see my memo. Perhaps my manager will review my files to evaluate my work. Perhaps I will end up having to discipline an employee who continues to use the photocopier for personal use, so my memo becomes a legal document used as evidence in the proceedings against the employee. Suddenly, new purposes and audiences open up for my "simple" memo. The words I wrote for my initial purpose may suddenly prove inadequate to the new demands on them.

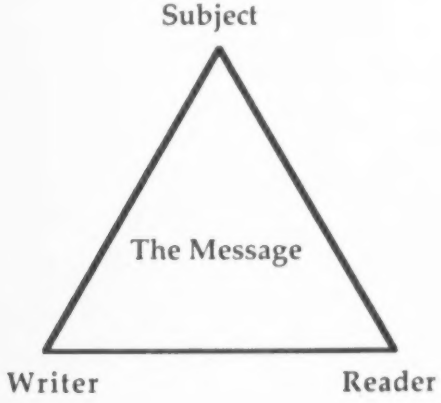
You often cannot predict where a memo will end up, into whose hands it will fall in addition to those named specifically at the top. Every time you decide to copy a memo up or down the organizational hierarchy, you risk appearing to go over someone's head or appearing to be insensitive to office politics. Often, the tone and approach that is right for the primary audience–perhaps a close supervisor–is totally wrong for the secondary audience–perhaps a manager up the line.

Writing has a permanence that speaking lacks. Once you commit an idea to a paper, it has a life of its own. It ends up in files where you don't expect it and shows up at the wrong time. Before you write, your first step must be to decide whether to write at all–whether your purpose might not be better realized by telephone or face-to-face communication.

A Communication Model of Writing

Many writers find visualizing the communication situation as a triangle to be helpful in conceptualizing writing tasks:

The Communication Triangle



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In this visual representation, the message–what is actually being communicated–is surrounded by those features that shape the message. At one corner is the writer, the one who usually has some purpose for sending a message. The writer sends the message to some reader or audience–represented at a second corner–who has some reason for reading the message. Finally, in the third corner there is the subject: the situation that the message is about. So the writer, the audience, and the subject are closely related, like three corners of the same triangle.

There is more to this representation, however. Note that the writer and reader are connected by one side of the triangle. They don't exist in isolation, but are directly tied in some relationship, represented by the connecting side. Every time you write, you establish a relationship between yourself and your audience. You assume, as a writer, a role of either asking or telling someone to do something, of either cajoling someone into cooperation or threatening someone with undesirable consequences. In other words, you don't simply send messages about the world when you write–you impose a relationship on the receiver of the message. It is in this touchy business of imposing relationships that writers often fail, for their sense of appropriate relations is often at odds with their reader's sense.

The other sides of the triangle represent the writer's understanding of the subject and the reader's understanding of the subject, two understandings which are rarely equal. Sometimes writers get so close to their subjects, they have such thorough understandings, that they begin to have trouble imagining what their readers don't understand. They begin using jargon or acronyms (abbreviations by first letters, as in UNIX or ASU) and insider language that their readers have trouble understanding.

The relation between the reader and the topic is especially tricky because it involves not only the reader's actual understanding of and attitude towards the topic, but also the writer's estimate of that understanding and attitude. You know the feeling of reading something where the writer seems to know much more than you do. And as a reader, you may sometimes be alienated by writers who patronize you by assuming that you know less than you really do.

Surrounding the whole triangle is the very messy, complicated world that influences the written text. Deadlines, budgets, outside issues that compete for our attention–all influence the shaping of the message. How messages are produced and delivered, what the reader's frame of mind is, whether a reader actually reads the message–everything in the situation that surrounds a message helps determine its success.

The communication triangle can remind you of the complexity of most writing situations, with its key elements at each corner and the connections between these elements. Writing often feels like a balancing act, trying to achieve an appropriate balance between appearing too bossy or too undecided; between writing as an expert or writing to be fully understood (even by novices); between relying on what readers know and deciding what they need to be told. The

triangle, with its geometry of perfect balance, offers you a metaphor of good writing.

Becoming a Good Writer

No book can teach you how to analyze your particular writing situations. To be a good writer–one who responds to the situational demands of particular purposes and audiences–you need all your analytical skills.

You need to be firmly in control of your work situation, understanding what needs to be accomplished and what are efficient strategies for attaining your purposes. You need to be a psychologist, understanding what motivates people and what alienates them. You need to be a manager, responsive to how duties and roles are assigned within your organization. And you need to be a politician, one who understands how to get competing groups to work harmoniously.

To be a good writer, you also need confidence. You need to trust your insight, to believe you have good ideas worth conveying. If you are insecure about the quality of your ideas, anxious about your authority, hesitant about your ability to solve problems through writing, you'll produce writing that is obscure, riddled with jargon, impenetrable, and confusing. Many insecure workers try to hide behind their writing, throwing up smokescreens that obscure and confuse.

Confident workers are confident writers–they articulate problems clearly and offer solutions which will stand on their own merits. Good writers take responsibility, confident they have ideas others will respect and respond to. Good writers recognize that most business situations are already complicated and don't need language which further complicates matters. Good writers appreciate prose that is lean and efficient, that works hard and gets the job done without a lot of wasted words.

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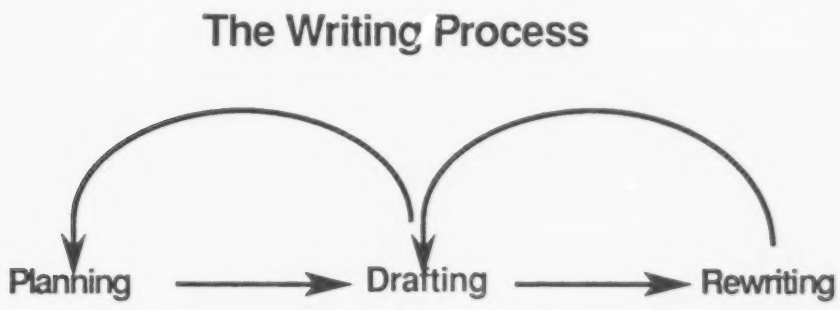
A Model of the Writing Process

Many people think that good writers sit down at a typewriter or word processor and let a document flow letter-perfect onto the page or screen. They themselves can't do this, but they believe that if they were truly good writers they would be able to do so.

In fact, good writing involves a great deal of planning up front before you begin to write, as well as rewriting after you finish a draft. The best writers are those who allot time before and after drafting to include these vitally important activities.

We speak of the writing process as having three stages:

1. **planning** (or prewriting),
2. **drafting** (or composing), and
3. **rewriting** (revising and editing).



Understanding writing as stages can help you produce successful documents. Depending on the importance of the document, the amount of time you have to produce it, and your writing experience, you may shortcut some of the activities in each stage. Nevertheless, when you're involved in any of them, you are truly engaged in writing.

The Planning Stage

It is important to have a clearly defined purpose for writing and to adapt your writing to a specific audience. But purpose and audience are only two of the things you need to think about in the planning stage, before you begin to write. You also need to think about the *type* of document you are going to produce--what it typically looks like and how it is typically organized. An internal memo is formatted and organized differently from a piece of external correspondence. You need to think about the *how* the document will be produced--handwritten, typed, printed, or sent through electronic mail. Each of these has a different look and a different impact on the reader. You need to think about what your likely

sources of *information* are and how much *time* you have. Time constraints often shape all stages of the planning and writing process.

Finally, you need to think about the *situation* in which you are writing--not just your immediate reason for writing, but the larger political and social situation. What has happened that calls for you to communicate at all? Why have you chosen to do so in writing? Where will your readers be when they read your document and what will they be doing with it?

Purpose, audience, type of document, medium of production, sources of information, available time, and situation are all things you need to think about in the planning stage.

Creating an Outline

Once you've given some thought to these considerations, you need to continue planning by gathering your information and creating a rough outline. Your outline needn't be formal--you can just jot down the main points you want to make and then, indented beneath each point, sketch a few sub-points or supporting pieces of evidence. Many people find it helpful to create diagrams that show the major points and their connections. Others like upside-down tree structures that show the hierarchy of the document. All the outline really needs to show is the order of points you're going to make, with some indication of what points are more important than others.

All of these planning activities take time. One thing we know from research is that good writers will take up to *half* of their total writing time in planning. Again, the amount of time you spend on these planning activities will depend on the importance and length of your document. It may also depend on whether you've written anything like this before, in which case you'll probably finish your planning faster.

Once you've thought about audience and purpose, gathered your information, and sketched out an outline, you're ready to begin drafting. But before you begin, notice the approach taken here. We're suggesting that you shape your document from the *outside in* (some writers call it *top down*). We're not suggesting you start with sentences on a page and try to build up a successful document word by word and sentence by sentence; instead we think you should begin with external considerations (audience, purpose, situation), and let your decisions there dictate the shape of the document you ultimately produce.

The Drafting Stage

Many people think that good writers write it right the first time, without having to go back and change anything. But while good writers may get it *pretty good* the first time (and experience helps here, especially previous experience in the type of document you happen to be writing), nobody gets it perfect the first time.

In fact, good writers typically go back and make lots of changes in their documents. But what good writers know is a technique that lets them get a first

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draft done very quickly. We'll share it with you here: *Good writers separate drafting from rewriting.* That means they don't try to get it perfect the first time; instead, they try to get their material down on the page or screen *before* they worry about cleaning it up. This simple technique can save you a lot of time, because it allows you to postpone editing and criticizing your writing until you get some ideas roughed out on the page or screen.

There's a good analogy here to building a house. After you lay the foundation for a house--which is essentially what you do in the planning stage of writing--you don't frame one panel of the house, install your wiring and plumbing in the panel, frame in a window, insulate the panel, sheetrock and wallpaper the inside, brick the outside, and then stand back and admire the beginnings of your house. For one thing, you'd be lucky to have all the seams and corners match in the final product. For another, it would be unbelievably expensive to keep calling in your various subcontractors to finish off one panel at a time: they'd all be there every day!

And yet, many people try to draft in just such an inefficient way. They work on one paragraph or section at a time, polishing off that section until they are satisfied enough to go on to the next section. No wonder such writing is so agonizing for its writers, and so choppy to its readers. And on top of being agonizing, such a method of writing is wasteful, because the one paragraph that you spend a long time polishing may end up in the scrap heap when you decide to rewrite.

Getting words on paper or screen will help you feel a sense of accomplishment, which in turn will motivate you to keep working on the document. Seeing words allows you to use your visual intelligence to organize what you have to say and fine tune your writing for your purpose and audience. Getting words down, even if the ideas are poorly organized, can help you think in ways that are just not possible when the ideas are simply milling about inside your head.

The Rewriting Stage

Once you have drafted your text, you are ready to begin rewriting for effectiveness. We'll distinguish between two activities within rewriting:

1) **revising** for large concerns like appropriateness for your audience, clarity of purpose, and overall organization; and
2) **editing**--rewriting to make your sentences and your word choice correct and effective.

So you'll want to first consider how well your document fits with your overall goals:

- Is my purpose clear?
- Is the tone right for my intended audience?
- Have I included the right amount of detail for the level of understanding I want my audience to have?

- Is the overall document organized logically?
- Does the text flow smoothly from section to section?
- Is the text visually appealing? Is it inviting, or does it look forbidding?
- Do I make good use of figures and tables to support my main points?

These questions are the domain of revising. It is a mental challenge to look at the whole document and make large-level decisions about whether it works. But you need to see the big picture before you start the nitty-gritty work of editing--or you'll end up with well-constructed sentences and paragraphs that don't add up to anything for your audience.

When you edit your writing, you need to take a really close look at what you have on the page (and not just what you think *think* you have on the page):

- Have I written complete sentences (not fragments or run-ons)?
- Do my subjects and verbs agree?
- Am I consistent in tense, number, person?
- Have I used correct spelling and punctuation?

One critical piece of advice in rewriting is to *sweat the small stuff last*. By *small stuff*, we mean spelling, punctuation, grammar, and phrasing--all those things that immediately jump out from the page at you when you re-read something you've written.

Sweating the small stuff last means that you should *revise before you edit*. Why is that good advice, when it seems easier to edit the small stuff first? Well, for the same reason that we encouraged you to draft the whole document or section completely before you start rewriting any particular section: Otherwise, you may later find yourself deleting a highly edited, brilliantly written paragraph because it doesn't fit the tone of rest of the document.

Of course, separating revising from editing means that you have to make multiple "passes" through a document when you're rewriting. And that makes sense, because it's difficult to read for both revising and editing concerns at the same time. It takes a lot of concentration to evaluate the logic and organization of a document, so you need to keep reminding yourself of your focus of concern. It's easy to get distracted by details.

Good writing is always hard work, but with practice you can learn to control your writing process and to balance your preferred style with the strengths of the other process style. Knowing how you work best and experimenting with new approaches can give you a sense of control over your work. This control, in turn, can make writing seem like less of a huge, unmanageable chore and more like what it should be--a productive, rewarding part of your career.

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Writing Memos and Short Reports

Writing is one of the ways that you communicate with other people at work. Memos and short reports can help you get things done, call attention to a situation, establish a written record of what happened, propose new ideas, solve problems, accept responsibility for a mistake or take credit for a success.

Writing good memos is one step to becoming a good supervisor or manager. Memos show how well you are thinking about the problems that come up in your job. They also serve as a permanent record of your performance. Most importantly, memos show that you can think clearly and take appropriate action.

Know when to write

Writing is formal and final. If a situation is better handled over the telephone or face-to-face, then take care of it that way. Often it is good to follow up a telephone call with a memo. The important thing is to remember that writing is a permanent record. If you have a good idea, and you want it remembered, writing a memo is one way people won't forget (or at least you can take away their excuse for forgetting).

Writing memos is a way of exercising power: when you write a memo, you record your version of the situation. Often, a single memo is the only written record. You know the phrase that is common in hospitals: "If it's not written down, it didn't happen." When you write, you control what happened.

Use your own words

Don't be afraid to use your own words. If you have an idea about something you work with all the time, then you know enough to write about it. Have confidence in yourself, your ideas and your abilities. Let your message keep you on track. Write it as you would say it. Writing that has a strong individual voice is always better than writing that sounds like a committee composed it.

Some people are hung up on old rules they learned in school. They think it is inappropriate to use contractions (*can't, shouldn't, doesn't*) or to use first person (*I, me, mine, we, us*). They try to make writing formal by following formal rules:

> Do not end a sentence with a preposition.
>
> Do not begin a sentence with *and* or *but*.
>
> Do not split an infinitive.

Unfortunately, these so-called rules are broken all the time by good writers. Such rules are really more distracting than helpful. Keep your eye on the point: What do you want your audience to think and do? Then use language that is appropriate to that audience and your purpose.

Use human actors in familiar contexts

Make your writing active and concrete: people doing things in recognizable situations. Think of writing as drama: actors doing things on a stage. People will understand your writing better and they will remember what you say longer. Try to get your actors on center stage: in the subject position of your sentence.

Instead of saying:	The report of the Safety Committee was found to have problems regarding a lack of compliance with state regulations.
Say	The Risk Manager decided that the Safety Committee report did not comply with state regulations.

Notice how the actor (the Risk Manager) is now the subject (the actor) and the verb carries the action (in the verb phrases *decided* and *did not comply).*

Instead of saying:	It is the decision of this office to support all employees in their pursuit of additional training in life support.
Say	As Patient Care Coordinator, I encourage you to take additional training in life support.

Keep people in your writing and you will be on your way to strong, effective writing.

Keep it short

Say what has to be said. Then stop. Why? Because:

- the reader can see what it's all about, quickly
- short words, sentences, and paragraphs are easier to read
- you get it over with sooner and can get on with the rest of your job

Sometimes shorter words aren't better. Sometimes a detailed description is needed. But most of the time short is best. Make your writing electric by keeping it short.

Some words sound important but mean very simple things. Don't get caught up trying to sound important. In memos, simple is better. Here are some examples.

Replace:	**with:**
activate	start
utilize	use
modification	change
at this point	now
I am of the opinion	I think
due to the fact that	because

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Big words and l o n g sentences slow the reader down. For instance, read these two memos:

To: Supervisor Jenkins

From: Tom Bigtalk

Re: Client slippage

As per our previous communication, we have been addressing the cleansing process in the pedestrian throughways. It has come to my attention in the process of my investigation of client slippage that our maintenance staff is utilizing a cleansing agent that seems to decrease the friction coefficient of the floor tiles. We have tested a different brand of cleansing agent, Sprat, in the south halls and have found it to reduce client slippage. What is more, the new cleansing agent is more cost efficient. I am of the opinion that Brand X would be the wisest choice for our future cleaning necessities.

To: Supervisor Jenkins

From: Tom Straightshooter

Subject: Changing the floor cleaner

We should change brands of floor cleaner. The floor cleaner we use makes the floor slick. I tested our current one against Sprat, and I found that Sprat doesn't make the floor slick and is cheaper. I'll wait to switch until you give me the go ahead.

Thanks.

Which would you rather read? Which would you rather write? Which is easier to understand?

Organize your thoughts

Start your memo with the action. Don't tell a story, or start with background, or give all of the history that lead up to the writing of the memo. If the main message comes first, the words on the page will help shape the rest of your memo.

Make sure your memo clearly tells your reader what to do. Maybe she likes your suggestion, but what does she do next? Does she need to make a phone call? Write another memo? Order 100 boxes of blood?

Don't just end by writing "I hope you like my idea." Show the reader that you have an action agenda: "I plan to suggest the change at next Wednesday's Supervisor's meeting. Please call me at x9109 if we need to discuss anything before then."

Think Visually

Think about the overall visual organization of the page. Use plenty of white space to separate blocks of print or different kinds of information. Allow ample margins, and use headings (even in fairly short documents) to show the reader how your memo or report is organized. Think about the balance of the page–how print is spread around the page. Try to invite your readers to read. Make your text look easy to read.

You might look at the pages in this book. What have we done to try to make the pages visually interesting and to show you the organization of material?

Treat readers like people

Sometimes writers forget what they are doing: communicating with someone else. If you expect people to pay attention to you, give them a reason to care about your idea. Ask yourself: why should my reader care? A lot of good ideas go unnoticed because writers didn't give the people making decisions a reason to care.

Find the bridges between you and your readers. Find the shared concerns. Get outside your own perspective and see the issue from your reader's point of view. Then work from mutual interests.

Use a few extra words to show politeness, cooperation, and mutual support. Be generous in your language. Be a psychologist who knows how to motivate people.

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Performance Appraisal

(These are the categories used by one hospital for performance appraisals. Note that this is not the entire form, only a list of the categories. Use this list to help you think through your memo regarding your own performance during the past twelve months.)

1. JOB KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

A. Has a general knowledge of the general occupational field.

B. Experience and knowledge gained for a specific job.

C. Skills as applicable to the job description.

(In narrative, describe fields of special competence and, as appropriate, comment on developmental progress and needs in current job.)

2. JUDGMENT AND PROBLEM SOLVING

A. Gets to the root of the problem and makes sound recommendations.

B. Foresees probable consequences of actions or recommendations.

C. Can analyze situations, determine issues, gather sufficient facts, weigh alternatives, and arrive at useful conclusions, for making recommendations.

D. Recognizes situations that supervisor should be consulted on or informed of.

3. RESPONSIBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE

A. Can work with success independently.

B. Carries out assignments and follows through.

C. Understands opposing views or obstacles when assigned tasks.

D. Sees that necessary things get done.

E. Can be depended upon, in terms of presence on the job, punctuality, effective use of time.

F. Accepts responsibility.

4. COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

A. Speaks well: Organization of ideas, adapting to the listener and situation, clarity of expression.

B. Writes well: Writing is clear, correct, well organized, complete, appropriate.

5. WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

A. Within the department, gets along with co-workers, is a good group worker, considers other points of view.

B. Outside the department, earns respect and cooperation of peers, management officials in other departments or other agencies or the general public.

C. Understands and respects the feelings of co-workers, patients and others.

6. ADAPTABILITY AND CREATIVITY

A. Adapts readily to changes in program direction or in procedures.

B. Displays creativity and originality in attaining work objectives.

C. Gives an extra portion when the job requires.

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D. Seeks self improvement and professional growth.

7. EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

A. Uses medical center equipment and supplies safely and economically.

B. Has knowledge of equipment used.

8. SAFETY

A. Demonstrates safe work habits.

B. Knows and adheres to the medical center safety procedures.

C. Is alert to safety hazards and takes initiative in getting them corrected.

SUMMARY Additional facts, specific achievements, strengths, weaknesses, or suggested improvements not covered under previous items.

FOLLOW-UP PLANNED

Professional Communication Log (__/____/____)

activity	time (how many minutes?)	type (writing, face-to-face, meeting, reading,phone)	Action / Outcome	Quality (+ o -)
#1				

Professional Communication Log (___/___/___)

activity	time (how many minutes?)	type (writing, face-to-face, meeting, reading,phone)	Action / Outcome	Quality (+ o -)
#1				

Professional Communication Log (___/___/___)

activity	time (how many minutes?)	type (writing, face-to-face, meeting, reading,phone)	Action / Outcome	Quality (+ o -)
#1				

Communication for Supervisors
Teacher's Guide

Communication for Supervisors was developed by **Step *Ahead*: A Partnership for Improved Health Care Communication. Step *Ahead*** is funded in large part by the U. S. Department of Education as a National Workplace Literacy Demonstration Project. Our other partners include The New Mexico Coalition for Literacy and seventeen hospitals within the State of New Mexico.

As a demonstration project, we are eager to share these materials with others who are engaged in not-for-profit literacy work. If you would like to use our materials, please write for permission to:

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We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of our partner organizations and especially wish to thank our many students who told us it really did make a difference.

August 13, 1993

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Dr. Stephen A. Bernhardt and Dr. Paul R. Meyer, Co-Directors

Table of Contents

Introduction....1

Philosophy of Communication for Supervisors....2

Course Goals....4

Teacher Role....4

Evaluation....6

Sample Daily Lesson Plans....7

Session 1: Introduction to Course and Communication Styles....7

Session 2: Basics of Supervision/Basics of Communication....10

Session 3: Writing and Reading - Handling Paper....11

Session 4: Listening and Speaking - Handling People....13

Session 5: Practical Applications - Panel or Workshop....15

Session 6: Setting Goals and Staying on Track....16

Session 7: Giving Feedback and Handling Problems....18

Session 8: Measuring Progress and Evaluating Performance....20

Customizing the Course....23

Record Keeping....24

Introduction

Communication for Supervisors is a course in supervisory and communication skills developed especially for hospital employees. It is designed to be taught on-site and to complement a hospital's other training and staff development efforts. The topical focus is workplace communication. The emphasis is on supervision and team leadership, but the communication skills it teaches are valuable in a variety of situations.

Communication for Supervisors is designed as a 16-hour course, with two eight-hour sessions. It can be adapted to four four-hour sessions, but shorter sessions will generally be less effective and disrupt the continuity of activities.

The course is intended to serve health care workers in many areas: nursing, dietary, housekeeping, patient accounts, lab, x-ray, administrative, and other hospital employees. It will be most useful to those who are new supervisors or team leaders or those who anticipate taking on these duties in the near future, but it is also useful as a refresher for experienced supervisors or for anyone interested in the unique communication demands on supervisory personnel. Teachers of the course are encouraged to adapt the course to various mixes of these audiences.

This **teacher's guide** is intended as an aid to teachers of the course, both to those teaching for **Step *Ahead*** and others who may be using our materials in other locations. It explains the philosophy of the course, offers some sample lesson plans, and describes how teachers can adapt the course to make it more work-related and more responsive to different audiences.

Communication for Supervisors was developed by Paul Meyer and Stephen Bernhardt of New Mexico State University as part of **Step *Ahead***, a Workplace Literacy Demonstration Project funded primarily by the U. S. Department of Education. **Step *Ahead*** develops and offers short courses in basic skills to employees in New Mexico hospitals. Courses focus on reading, writing, oral communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. **Step *Ahead*** also works with the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy and local literacy groups to establish workplace-related tutoring efforts on site in the workplace.

Philosophy of Communication for Supervisors

Communication for Supervisors is based on the premise that supervision demands different communication skills and work skills than those required for front line workers. We believe that improving supervisors' communication skills benefits a hospital, its employees, and its patients. It results in better morale, improved teamwork, and increased efficiency in the hospital. Better supervisory communication skills help workers to understand and do their jobs better, make their work more pleasant and less frustrating, and provide them with guidance for advancement within the hospital. Better supervisory communication also results directly in improved patient care. It reduces risk and eliminates costly mistakes and do-overs by clarifying job and task assignments.

Communication for Supervisors is based upon rhetorical theory, communication theory, and management theory. The course emphasizes that supervisors need to be able to understand particular communication situations and communication styles, and it encourages supervisors to understand and be able to use effectively all four means of communication; reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Each of these is discussed and practiced prior to using them in particular work-related situations. As participants practice and become more comfortable with using each of the communication skills, they will be introduced to more detailed techniques for using the individual skills and combinations of the skills. Woven through the course are particular management situations which supervisors are likely to encounter or may have encountered. In this way, management theory is introduced as a complement to the basic communication skills, since the two are inseparable in actual practice.

Communication for Supervisors focuses on helping participants develop effective means for interacting with others in a supervisory role. It emphasizes the need to develop relationships with others through communication as a means to understand them and to provide challenging and rewarding work to each individual. We believe this is more effective than trying to control behavior through fear and punishment, and that individuals will respond more positively to honest two-way communication than to authoritarian direction.

We don't have much time with these employees, but if we can give them new ways to think about communication in their work groups and ways to productively interact with others in their work groups, then our effects can be long lasting. We are planting seeds that we hope will grow in our absence. While all of the skills and techniques may not be applicable to a particular supervisor at the current time, we believe that an awareness of different situations and an opportunity to practice these skills will allow supervisors to see communication from different perspectives. When new situations arise, they should be able to draw on their experience rather than responding with an available but inappropriate communication habit.

The course does not have the time to deal with every type of situation which supervisors may encounter. We want to get people thinking about

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communication in new and different ways, understanding that communication is a two-way process, and getting the most important issues clearly in their minds. If a supervisor recognizes certain situations and communication problems, his or her communication is much more likely to be successful.

Communication for Supervisors uses lecture, class discussion, and role plays to teach participants about communication and supervision and to help them sharpen their skills. The course is meant to be active and interactive, with students asking questions, contributing situations and problems from their workplace, and bringing to the table issues that affect them on a daily basis. We rely on collaborative discussion of many of the situations and potential solutions to drive much of the learning in the classroom. We also rely on this collaboration to demonstrate the value of networking with other supervisors as a means to solve problems or get new ideas.

The teacher needs to stress that effective supervisory communication is more often learned than taught. What students learn will relate directly to how much energy and attention they give the course, both in class and on the job. Students need to be aware of how the skills and techniques they are learning will apply to their particular situation. The teacher needs to stress that using and practicing the skills will seem awkward and forced at first, but that without practice and constant awareness, the learning will disappear. People taking the course need to agree to undertake the effort. It costs a lot of money to deliver these courses–students who don't do the work or who attend only sporadically will lose the continuity and waste a valuable resource.

All questions are always relevant–big and small. People think about things unrelated to the day's lesson, and we think it is important to attend to whatever questions come up. Using examples from personal experience is an especially valuable means to build credibility and demonstrate use of the skills. The teachers should try to be clear and correct in responses, and should try to relate responses to the material being covered, all the while recognizing that there is never just one right answer to supervisory problems. Unfortunately, supervision is as much an art as a science, and there will be exceptions to any rule or guideline. Discussing these openly and honestly and asking for feedback from the class will clearly show that there are many ways to handle different situations, and supervisors must constantly be open to new and different ways of doing things.

Communication for Supervisors was tested and revised in a hospital setting. People from every area of the hospital have taken the course and provided us with valuable insights and examples from their own experience. We continue to use these and their valuable feedback in revising the course and making it more relevant to their jobs.

Course Goals

Participant Goals

Communication for Supervisors is designed to improve the communication and supervisory skills of participants. Specific goals are listed on page 1 of the coursebook. Participants can add goals for themselves. Teachers are also encouraged to add any goals that the class believes are pertinent as these goals are introduced and discussed. This will provide guidance for tailoring the course to the particular mix of participants.

Participants should feel that they have benefited from the course. Teachers should pay close attention to course evaluations to see whether participant goals are being met, and should revise the way they teach the course as seems reasonable. **Communication for Supervisors** uses a performance appraisal format for assessing whether or not the teachers have met the course goals, and this is a valuable supplement to the standard evaluation sheet. Course goals can be reviewed several times during the course to assess whether or not the teachers are on target.

Teacher Role

Most of the time, **Communication for Supervisors** is taught by a team of two teachers: a lead teacher and an assistant. Two teachers can do a more thorough job of covering the material and allow the class to be divided so that activities like role-playing can be done more efficiently. This is also our primary way of developing new teachers. Assistant teachers learn how to teach the course by working with an experienced teacher. Two teachers also provide interest for the students, and the inevitable disagreements between the two teachers about particular issues can lead to productive class discussion.

For this course, it is imperative that the teachers have some supervisory or management experience. Without this experience, it will be difficult for the team to establish the credibility they need with the class. We have found that most classes will test the teachers on their experience, and may lose interest if the material can't be grounded in practical experience.

Teachers should try to achieve good attendance levels and full group participation. They should try to get each participant to identify communication problems in his or her work area and discuss them in class and try out the solutions on the job. To the extent possible, teachers should adapt the course to the particular audience they are teaching. Teachers should also maintain good records. They should make sure to administer and collect course evaluations.

When problems arise, the teacher should talk with the project coordinators (Bernhardt and Meyer) and/or with the hospital coordinator. Sometimes it might help resolve some issue by meeting with the employee and the employee's supervisor. Generally, problem situations are delicate and it is best to get some advice before moving too quickly. We try to respect employee confidences–we never want to be perceived as reporting on bad behavior to or

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about supervisors. The teachers for this course need to be particularly sensitive to the issue of confidentiality. If they are assured of confidentiality, supervisors will enhance the class discussions by using actual examples from their work areas; if confidentiality is broken, they will be reluctant to discuss these issues, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of the course.

Teachers need to convey enthusiasm and belief in the worth and the potential of the students. Many of the outcomes of our instruction have to do with somewhat subjective goals: enhanced self esteem and self-confidence in handling difficult communication situations; lessened anxiety about supervising others, particularly former coworkers; and a belief that good communication is possible and something to work toward, even with difficult employees and supervisors. The course should lead to positive feelings toward others in one's work group and in the hospital and a sense that improvement is possible through teamwork. For many new supervisors, there is great uncertainty about their ability to make the transition from front line worker to manager. We are helping people gain very important skills and to understand and anticipate some of the new situations. We need to do so in ways that are sensitive to the anxieties of adult learners.

The teachers should be personable and animated, displaying a good sense of humor and a genuine interest in the students' well being. Teachers should be professional. As representatives of NMSU, teachers should dress professionally, use professional language, and exercise professional decorum.

When people rate workplace instruction, their first concern is whether the teachers or trainers were entertaining and interesting. Try to be both. In this course, people are also concerned about the credibility of the teachers. Establishing your own credibility early will ease your job.

Teachers should act in ways that reflect the best interests of the hospital. They must refrain from damaging personal gossip and they should try to encourage students to act in ways that support the best interests of the hospital. In our classes, information always arises that could be damaging to other workers, to the hospital, or to the relation of hospital to community. In such situations, the privacy and interests of the workers and of the hospital must be protected. It is the teacher's job to keep the class talk professional and productive. No good purpose is served by criticizing a fellow worker with loose talk in class.

When in doubt about what to do with information learned in class or as a result of class contacts, talk with one of the project coordinators (Meyer or Bernhardt) or with the hospital Step *Ahead* coordinator. Under no circumstances can compromising information about the hospital or its employees become the subject of gossip or dissemination. Teachers of these courses are on contract to the hospital and owe the hospital every confidence. A hospital's reputation in a community is critical to its success, and our role is to support the hospital and its employees.

Evaluation

For program evaluation purposes, two evaluation questionnaires will usually be used. Students will fill out a course evaluation form specifically targeted at what they learned in **Communication for Supervisors**. They will sometimes complete a second standard course evaluation questionnaire from the hospital. Be sure to know what the situation is and be prepared to administer required evaluations.

There is no formal evaluation of participants and their learning in **Communication for Supervisors**. Because each class will deal with different problems and communication situations, it is difficult to establish "right or wrong" assessments which fit each participant. We are trying to develop new perspectives and new communication habits, and long term assessments may be used in the future to determine how successful participants have been in assimilating the new information.

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Sample Daily Lesson Plans

The following lesson plans are provided as an aid to help teachers plan and budget class time. They do not have to be followed slavishly but do give teachers a good idea of how class time is meant to be spent. In most cases, this course book contains more material than can be covered in 16 hours. The suggested lesson plans contain 8 sessions of about two hours each. It is generally better to try to maintain the schedule according to these "chunks" and leave out material as necessary than to try to cover every page. Each lesson plan has a brief narrative description of class activities and goals and a temporal outline or plan. The plans assume two eight-hour class days, which for the purposes of exemplification we assume take place from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, with a one-hour lunch. Typically, the course will be team-taught. The team should meet before class and decide who has leadership responsibility for each activity. Some activities work well if one person writes at the board or on a flip chart while the other fields input from the class. Teachers should adapt these lesson plans to their own situations. Break times are suggested but can be used any time as appropriate.

Session 1: Introduction to Course and Communication Styles

7:45 Teachers arrive. Get attendance sheets. Set up room. We have found that a U or horseshoe shape works well and facilitates interaction. Distribute course books and name tags at each place. Make sure the overhead works, that there are chalk, pens, markers, or whatever is needed. Greet and talk with students as they arrive. Have them fill out name tags with first name in large letters.

8:00 Distribute Supervisor Bingo sheets and get participants moving about the room meeting each other and putting names in boxes. Don't allow their own name or anyone else in more than two boxes. The points are to get them to meet others and to understand the range of potential supervisory duties.

8:05 Get participants seated and go through list. Ask for show of hands as to who has done each of these things. People will get a sense of who has experience and who is new. Teacher will get a good sense of the experience level of the class and what may need to be emphasized.

8:15 Teacher introductions. Include background and experience, especially relevant supervisory experience. Give a brief overview of the course. Show organization of materials and talk about schedule. Stress importance of punctuality. Note that course is basically split into two parts: Basics of Communication and Supervision, covered on the first day; and Practical Applications, or using the basics, on the second day.

8:20 Have participants introduce themselves. Ask such questions of individuals as:

- What is your current job? Are you a supervisor?
- How long have you been doing your job? How long have you been with the hospital?
- How many people do you supervise?
- What do you hope to get out of this course?

8:35 Put up overhead of Course Goals and review briefly. Ask for other goals which participants may want to include. This will also help to tailor the course to this audience. Write additional goals on overhead for later reference.

Tell participants that one way they will be evaluating the course and teachers will be to prepare and deliver a performance appraisal. The performance appraisal will be based on how well the teachers meet the goals. Note that participants should make notes at various times as to how well or poorly they are being met. They will use these notes to prepare the appraisal at the end of the second day.

8:45 Note the Points to Remember page. Tell participants to use it to jot down important things they get from the sessions. Return to this and ask for ideas at least at the end of every four-hour session to keep it in mind.

Discuss Homework Assignments and ask people to keep a Communication Log for some period of time between now and the next session (next day). Note readings at the end of book. Suggest a memo to self as a way to understand their communication style and goals.

Discuss the beginning of the second day. Usually this will be a week away, but it will come up at the start of the second eight hours, whenever that is. If the participants are fairly new to supervision, a panel discussion may be useful, bringing in several experienced supervisors to answer questions and share their experience. If participants are fairly experienced, offer to workshop some of their own problems during the session. This will require them to share some of their problems with the class and see what others would do. Let the class decide which they prefer. Both formats are valuable. If they choose to have a panel, you will need to arrange for several supervisors to be there at the proper time for about an hour. Use the hospital coordinator to get this done. If they choose to workshop problems, remind them to bring issues to discuss.

8:55 Turn to Focusing on Communication. Ask participants to take about ten minutes and think about good and bad supervisor communication. Have them write characteristics or examples in their coursebooks.

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Take about 10 minutes to discuss some of these. You may want to make a list of good and bad characteristics on a flip chart or a blackboard.

9:15 Distribute communication style evaluation forms. Have participants circle the one in each pair which is most like them. If neither or both are like them, offer ways to decide, such as deciding which is most unlike them and circling the other. Watch until most are finished and self-scored. Ten minutes is usually sufficient.

9:25 Put the Communication Styles/Work Styles grid on the overhead. Note that often communication difficulties are caused by differences in communication or work style and are not due to good or bad communication. Point out the two dimensions of the grid and the four quadrants. Column 1 is action oriented; Column 2 is idea oriented; Column 3 is people oriented; and Column 4 is process oriented. Have participants enter their column totals in each quadrant and see which is dominant for them. Also note that adding the top two and comparing to the bottom two will tell if they are more people or task oriented, while left-right comparisons will tell if they are more aggressive or passive. Emphasize that the styles are just different, not good or bad, better or worse. Be sure each participant understands where he or she falls on the grid.

Go on to discuss the characteristics of each style along with strengths and weaknesses. Ask people if they recognize themselves. Ask them if they recognize others in their work group or in the hoopital. Allow plenty of time for discussion to be sure people have grasped the concepts. Note that once we understand where we and others fall, we can often facilitate communication by moving into another person's comfort zone or style. Note that for each of us to grow, we must move into the opposite areas, across the middle. It is often helpful to discuss your own style and give some examples.

Point out the value of understanding other styles. We can put ourselves in others' shoes and we can often tailor work assignments to the particular work style of an employee. It can really facilitate communication in a group.

9:55 Point out the Think It Through section. Encourage people to do the exercises when they have some time to further understand the concepts.

10:00 Break for 10 minutes.

Session 2: Basics of Supervision and Basics of Communication

10:10 Put up What Supervisors Do overhead. Ask class to provide ideas of what tasks supervisors have which are different from those required of front line workers. Write tasks on overhead. Take about ten minutes.

10:20 Go to Making the Transition. Break the group into three teams. If the group is extremely large or small, this may need to be adjusted. Assign scenario 1 to one group, 2 to another, three to the last. Tell them to discuss the problem and come up with a response. Also tell them to choose one person to play each of the people in the scenario for a role play. Allow about ten minutes for discussion.

At the end of the ten minutes, get two people from the first group in chairs in front of the group for a role play. Have them describe the situation and then go through the role play. Ask for comments from the group. Do the same with each of the other scenarios. Try to keep to eight to ten minutes for each. The second and third will go more quickly.

11:00 Point out Some Definitions. Don't spend a lot of time on this. Point out ones which you believe are key. Effectiveness/efficiency, leadership, empathy, and goals/objectives are some.

11:05 Put up the Leadership overhead. Get the class to spend about 5 minutes identifying leadership characteristics. Important characteristics should include integrity, vision, honesty, and so on. You may want to define the difference between leaders and managers, courtesy of Peter Drucker, Warren Bennis, Bert Nanus and others: Managers do things right; Leaders do the right things.

11:10 Turn to Needs and Motivation. Ask the participants to rank the top three for themselves. Take about five minutes. Ask for number one from several people, or for their top three. There will be differences. Point out that this is normal. Not everybody wants or needs the same things. This is also true of their employees. Ask them to think about how their employees would rank this list.

Discuss the idea that meeting employee needs is an effective way to motivate them. Tailoring assignments or rewards to meet their needs will make them more motivated to do the jobs you assign. But to do this, they must understand their employees and their needs. This means establishing relationships through communication.

11:20 Turn to From Needs to Motivation. Note that their are other ways to motivate employees. Clear communication and leadership by example are two ways. Discuss the six ways in this section. Discuss expectations.

11:30 Turn to Total Quality Management (TQM). Use this section as a brief overview if there is time. Most hospitals are going to some form of TQM, or Operations Improvement (OI), Continuous Quality

Improvement (CQI), or another version of the same thing. These are some common basic principles.

11:40 Turn to Managing Time. Discuss each of these ideas briefly and ask how many people do each of them. Ask for other suggestions. Let people show their "To Do" lists or calendars.

11:50 Use the Communication Triangle and overhead to preview the afternoon session. Note the importance of the sides of the triangle, which are the relationships between each of the points.

Use the Communication Skills grid to show the relationships among the various skills. Note that these will be discussed this afternoon.

11:55 Put up Points to Remember. Ask for input about important things from the morning session. Write a few on the overhead. Remind them to make notes about the goals for the performance appraisal.

12:00 Break for lunch. Remind them to be back promptly at 1:00 PM.

After class or during lunch: Team teachers should discuss their impressions and possible ways to tailor the class. Note problems and ways to work around them.

Session 3: Writing and Reading - Handling Paper

1:00 Put course goals back on overhead to remind participants about making notes about progress or incidents. Ask if there are any other goals.

1:05 Put up the overhead of the Writing Process. Discuss the steps we go through as we write memos, reports, and other documents. Note that it is an iterative process. Discuss the difference between writing as process and writing as product. Emphasize the process perspective–process as a way to relieve writer's block. Individuals might draw a diagram of how they write–what they do first, second, and so on. Then compare to model. Discuss importance of planning and researching.

1:15 Turn to the Purpose and Audience Worksheet. Tie this to the Communication Triangle shown in the morning session. Discuss why it is critical to keep these ideas in mind. Think about action desired, secondary audiences, writing versus speaking.

1:25 Turn to Some Planning Strategies. Review these strategies with some examples, if possible. Ask the class for an example of a real writing task someone has coming up. Use it to demonstrate the use of the strategies. Get a discussion going with the class. It is especially

valuable to use bigger examples for treeing and clustering. Do this on the board or on a flip chart.

Note that many of these techniques are designed to get something down on paper rather than getting stuck. They are ways to organize your writing. After working through them, you may decide you need more information or you need two documents to deal with separate subjects. Ask for other ideas from the class. Ask if they use any of these techniques.

1:45 Turn to Drafting Strategies. Discuss the difference between planning and drafting. Review each of the stategies briefly. Point out the value of getting something down and then revising it.

If there is time, you may want to ask people to complete a brief memo or practice with one of the techniques.

2:00 Turn to Revising and Editing Checklist. Tie this back to the Communication Triangle and the Purpose and Audience Worksheet. Discuss the difference between revising and editing: revising deals with macro level changes; editing deals with micro level changes.

Revising can mean attending to larger level concerns of:

scope: how much does it cover?
purpose: what is it trying to do? what is the action agenda?
audience adapation: who will read it and does it take into account what they know and feel?
strategy: what is the approach? is it likely to work?
organization: what are the parts? how are they ordered? is the order effective for the reader?

Editing can mean fixing the small stuff (it's still important, but can be left until late in the process–talk about why).

You may want to discuss resources such as the Handbook of Business Writing.

2:10 Turn to Strategies for Quick Writing. Discuss when it is appropriate to use one of these. Work through some examples on the board or flip chart using class input. You may want to give an exercise and have people partially complete an assignment using one of the techniques.

2:25 Turn to What is Active Reading? Discuss the ideas and when each is appropriate. Would you use these with all kinds of reading? Get a discussion going about when each is appropriate.

Have people list some characteristics of their own reading style. Discuss whether reading helps them or gets in their way as they work. What could they do differently?

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2:35 Turn to SQ3R. Note that these techniques can help them become active readers. Discuss what types of reading may be appropriate for applying SQ3R. Point out that much of what they have to read can probably be scanned and discarded. If it needs more attention, move to the questioning. If it is still important, continue with more in-depth reading. Ask how many use some of these techniques. Ask if there are other techniques they use.

2:45 Have them turn to "Listening Isn't Easy" in the readings section at the back of the course book. Tell them that you want to practice some of these techniques. Tell them you are going to give them one minute to read the article and get the main points. Start and time them.

Stop them after one minute and ask for what the article was about. Ask for main points. Ask for details. Ask for how they got main points. Note the importance of reading sidebars, quotes, bold headers, and last paragraph to get ideas quickly. Then try again.

Discuss the ideas in the article briefly. Use this to transition to the next section about active listening. This is a good bridge. Encourage them to go back and read the article in depth later. It has a lot of good ideas.

3:00 Take a ten minute break.

Session 4: Listening and Speaking - Handling People

3:10 Turn to Active Listening. Discuss listening as a means of communication, maybe the most important. Briefly discuss each of the methods of active listening. Emphasize how important it is to give the speaker all your attention.

3:20 Move to Listening to Understand People: Empathy. Note the difference between empathy and sympathy. Tie this back to Communication Styles and Needs. Note that this is one of the most effective ways to establish open communication. Review each of the ideas briefly and use some examples to demonstrate how they can be effective. Ask for examples from the class.

3:35 Move to Paraphrasing. Remind people that it may seem awkward and mechanical at first and it needs to be practiced. It will only be successful if they are sincere about understanding either people or situations. If they are using it as a technique without sincerity, people will get turned off by it. Go over each of the techniques and discuss the examples. Emphasize the importance of active listening as a key part of paraphrasing.

You may find it helpful to use the following key words to build skill in paraphrasing; Repeat, Rephrase, Reflect. Repeat means simply to repeat basically what the other person has said. It will demonstrate that you are listening, but doesn't demonstrate real understanding. Rephrase means to repeat the content of what the other person has said in your own words and to ask if that is what they really mean. This demonstrates that you are really hearing what the person is saying and trying to understand. Reflect means to reflect the feeling or emotion the other person is using. This demonstrates much better understanding because you need to understand the content in terms of how it is affecting the other person emotionally. This will be the hardest step and will require the most practice, but will give the best understanding and will really open up communication.

A very good exercise at this point will provide some practice in paraphrasing. Break the group into teams of three. Ask one person in each team to be the speaker, one person to be the listener or paraphraser, and one person to be an observer. Ask the speaker to talk about a subject important to him or her, and ask the listener to try active listening and paraphrasing techniques to try to really understand. The observer should simply watch and make notes about what happens.

Allow the group about three minutes or so, and then give them a mnute or two for observations and feedback. Change roles so another is speaker and listener. Repeat the exercise so each person has a chance to play each role. At the end, ask for class feedback and observations. Was it difficult? Did they get real understanding? What did the observers see and hear?

4:00 Turn to Body Language. Note that body language is an extremely important means of communication. It is also very heavily culturally dependent. What may seem rude or aloof to us may seem polite or deferential to another. We need to be aware of body language and see what it tells us about what is being said.

4:05 Move to Behaviors that Shortcircuit Listening. Go over each of the examples and ask for alternate ways of responding. This can be an exercise in class or can be written and discussed. Be sure to get participation from everyone.

4:20 Put the Speaking vs. Writing overhead up. Ask for when each is appropriate. Get class suggestions for which is better for different situations, and what the advantages and disadvantages are for each.

4:25 Move to How to Discuss. Go over each of the points and get some class discussion. Emphasize that most of the points rely on establishing relationships with others and treating them with respect. Especially important are sharing in decision-making, respect, win-win solutions,

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and "I" language. Get class participation in rephrasing the "You" statements. Emphasize that this is taking responsibility versus assigning blame.

4:40 Go to Open vs. Closed Questions. Discuss the difference and use the examples. If there is time, have everyone decide whether each of the exercises is open or closed and then write another way to ask the closed questions to make them open. If time is tight, do this as an exercise in class.

4:50 Put up the Points to Remember overhead. Get several entries from the class. Remind them to make notes about progress toward Course Goals for the performance appraisal next week (or whenever the next session is).

If there will be a panel for the next session, remind participants to come prepared with questions to ask the supervisors. If you are going to workshop problems, remnd them to bring some situations which are causing them problems to discuss with the class.

5:00 End the class. Thank people for their participation.

Session 5: Practical Applications - Panel Discussion or Workshop

7:45 Teachers arrive and set up room depending on first activity. Check equipment and supplies, attendance sheets. Greet participants as they arrive.

8:00 If you are having a panel discussion, get some information from the participants for introductions. Tell them the purpose of the panel, to give some new supervisors some idea of the types of problems they will encounter and how experienced supervisors handle those. Expect them to stay for an hour at least, more if the discussion is going well and they can afford the time.

Introduce the panel and allow them to make an introductory statement if they wish. Ask for questions. Be prepared with some questions of your own or some situations from the previous class to start the ball rolling.

If you are going to workshop problems, set the room up in the normal fashion to facilitate interaction. Ask for problems or situations. Be prepared with some ideas from the previous week if they need prompting. Watch the discussion and move to a new subject if the conversation gets off track or seems resolved. Keep the discussion focused on communication and supervision. Tie the discussion to the material from the previous or for today.

Allow about an hour and a half for problems or discussion. If the panel needs to leave after an hour, continue the discussion with class feedback on what they had to say.

9:30 Ask participants if there are any things from the previous week that they want to review or clarify. Spend time to do this as necessary.

Discuss the plans for today. Remind them that they will be doing a performance appraisal later based on the goals set up for the course. Put up the Course Goals overhead to remind them what they are. Ask for feedback as to progress at the present time.

Ask who has done the Communication Log. What did they discover? How many types of communication did they use? How was the quality? Were they more aware of communication after the exercise?

10:00 Take a ten-minute break.

Session 6: Setting Goals and Staying on Track

10:10 Turn to Improving Performance with Clear Goals. During discussion, emphasize that collaborative goal setting is most effective. It essentially establishes a contract between supervisor and employee and allows for self-evaluation. Also emphasize the three characteristics of good goals. Put up the Course Goals overhead and evaluate the goals for meeting the three criteria. Think about changing goals if they do not meet the criteria.

Tie the review and acknowledge parts to performance appraisal. Regular review minimizes surprises at appraisal time. Acknowledgement is positive reinforcement.

10:25 Move to Praise People for Accomplishing Goals. Ask how many do it. Ask for unique ways of recognizing success. Many hospitals have programs in place for recognizing success. Emphasize the value of putting it in writing. Also emphasize the importance of recognizing progress if the employee is learning something new. Finally, emphasize that it is hard to overdo it, since in general we don't do it anywhere near often enough.

If there is time, you may want to set up a hypothetical situation and have people write a note praising an employee. You can break the class into groups to do this. Give them five to ten minutes and have them read responses. Watch for specific reference to the situation you set up. Note the variety of responses and point out that there is not a right way or wrong way to do it. Ask if it made them feel good to write these. Also tie the writing to some of the writing tips from the first day.

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10:40 Turn to Reprimand Behavior, Not People. Emphasize the importance of reprimand or correction for incorrect or unacceptable behavior. This is the other side of praise, and there needs to be a balance between the two. If it is all one or the other, people will begin to discount any feedback. Tie this back to the How to Discuss and ideas of "I" language, and also to dealing with emotions and understanding. Ask people if they find it hard to reprimand employees. Why? What can they do to make it less traumatic?

10:55 Turn to Making Assignments. Much of this is designed to get people thinking about the people involved when they make assignments and to broaden their perspectives. Tie this back to Communication and Work Styles and also to the goals that have been set for an employee. Emphasize the importance of getting agreement or buy-in from an employee for an assignment.

Ask for some feedback concerning some of the participants' employees. How could they take some of these ideas into consideration when making assignments?

11:10 Go to Issuing Instructions. Emphasize Clarity and Completeness. Tie this back to some of the writing tips and to the Communication Triangle. This continues the theme of having good relationships with employees and knowing what they need.

11:20 Turn to Planning and Running a Meeting. Ask how many have to plan or run meetings. Is it successful? Ask about common problems or complaints about meetings. Emphasize the importance of an agenda and staying on track. Go over each of the points in order.

It is also important to point out that people can use these hints to help keep meetings that they attend running smoothly. Whoever is running the meeting will welcome their help. Preview the section on difficult people when you talk about staying on track. Also tie back to How to Discuss and Active Listening.

11:50 Put up the Points to Remember overhead. Get two or three new items from this morning's session.

Put up the Course Goals again and remind people to be making notes for the Performance Appraisal later in the afternoon.

12:00 Break for lunch.

Session 7: Giving Feedback and Handling Problems

1:00 Turn to Reviewing the Writing of Others. This can be minimized or deleted if the participants don't review writing from their employees. The tips can stand on their own if the section is skipped. Otherwise, tie it back to the Revising and Editing Checklist and some of the writing tips. Emphasize the idea of remaining positive to encourage further work and not discourage an employee. Note opportunities for self-evaluation using the same tips.

1:10 Go to Solving Problems. Note that this is basically a conflict resolution technique. Each of the steps can be drawn as a stairstep diagram Emphasize that each step must be completed before going to the next, but that sometimes progress can be very quick. Emphasize that the supervisor must remain in control and remain objective.

Ask if people have seen this kind of situation before. How do they deal with it? Will these steps help? Get some class feedback.

There is another problem-solving technique which can be introduced here or in the Meeting session. It is essentially a technique for clarifying and finding solutions to problems that come up. It requires the participants to answer four questions and not move on until they are satisfied. The four questions are:

What is the problem? - this is required to be sure that people really understand the problem and aren't jumping to conclusions as to what they think it is. Sometimes they may have to step back to see what the problem really is.

What are the possible solutions? - this can be answered through non-judgmental brainstorming and getting out all of the possible solutions before making any kind of an evaluation.

What is the best solution? - this requires an analysis of the costs, schedule, and other factors affecting each possible solution. It may require another meeting after participants research some of the solutions. It will be best to reach consensus to get buy-in from all participants.

How do we implement it? - this is the final question and should be considered carefully if it affects major parts of the operation or involves major costs or changes.

1:25 Turn to Coping with Criticism. Discuss where criticism comes from. Note that it may involve emotions and may mask other problems. Tie this back to active listening and empathizing. Review each of the points and examples to be sure people understand them. Point out that in most cases, but not all, the steps will be most effective if used in the order presented. Communication really opens up when these steps are followed and we can often get to the real problem as we listen and remain open and non-defensive.

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1:35 Go to the Coping with Criticism Exercise. Go through the first exercise with the class and get several responses for each step. Be sure they fit the criteria.

Break the class up into four equal groups and assign a criticism from exercise 2 to each group. Give them ten minutes or so to some up with responses. Then get two people from each group to role play each situation in front of the class. Ask for class feedback. Ask for feedback from the role players as to how they felt, were they being heard, did they get a resolution to their problem.

Alternately, if time is tight, you can pick two people from class to role play the first situation and get feedback. Then pick two more to do the second and so on. Be sure to get feelings and feedback from the role players. Often they will get really wrapped up in the role play.

A second alternative is to ask for examples from the class of criticism they have gotten recently. Get them to role play the real situation.

2:15 Turn to Problem People. If time is tight, this section can be reviewed by participants on their own. The basic idea is that there are some techniques which can be used to handle difficult people. For the most part, the techniques will handle the immediate problem, but they will not get real communication going. That will require active listening or other forms of communication to get to the real root of the problem.

Ask who recognizes some of these people. Ask for other examples. Ask for other ways of handling people that participants may have found effective.

2:25 Turn to Confronting. Note that this should be considered carefully as a supervisory, but when necessary it must be done. Leaving problems can undermine morale in an entire work group. It must also be done in private.

Go through each of the steps. Tie back to How to Discuss, Active Listening, emotions, Understanding the Situation, and "I" language. Emphasize that getting to understanding may mean you have to change. Remind them they are dealing with another person and must not get defensive.

2:45 Turn to Confronting: Practice. Get two people to read the dialogue. Go over the questions at the end of the dialogue. Be sure to find out how it made the readers and the listeners feel. Were they uncomfortable? Why?

Ask for some examples from the class. Do they have situations where they need to confront someone? Do they want to role play it? Do these role plays and get class feedback if you can. This may run into the next session, but it is more valuable to do these.

3:00 Take a ten minute break.

Note: It is very unlikely that the class will actually stay on this schedule. The role plays and discussion with Criticism, Confrontation, and Solving Problems generally take more than the time allotted above. If that is the case, it is more productive to let the discussions continue and to break at about 3, then shorten the following session. It is possible to get through the Performance Appraisal and course evaluation portion in as little as an hour, although it is rushed. Some suggestions are given below.

Session 8: Measuring Progress and Evaluating Performance

3:10 Put up the overhead of Why Do Performance Appraisals? Get class feedback and ideas along with discussion. Improving performance should be one of the items; if it is not, be sure to add it. Discuss the importance of not doing more than is required with a performance appraisal. For example, if there is no reason to rank employees, don't do it. If there is no purpose to a numerical "grade," don't do it. If everybody will get the same raise or no raise, skip the ranking. Unnecessary parts of a performance appraisal just raise suspicion and defeat the communication that should be central to the feedback.

As people give reasons for performance appraisals, discuss those reasons and whether they are legitimate. Get people to question assumptions. The point is to get people clear on why they do appraisals other than "the administration requires it."

3:25 Turn to Managing Performance Appraisals. Discuss the five main points. Note the importance of giving feedback and keeping notes all year long, along with giving interim feedback. This will eliminate surprises. The performance should never be a surprise.

The first step is gathering data and information. This is where regular notes and interim reviews will prove valuable. This step will be tough if you have to remember a year's worth of activities with no notes. It will be critical to review the employee's goals for the year.

Organizing data and planning the appraisal can be tied back to some of the planning and drafting strategies from the writing section. Note that in planning the appraisal, only the most important three or four points should be used. If you try to include everything, you will dilute the importance of your main points. Decide what is critical and leave the rest for informal discussions. But be sure to be specific and not deal in generalities. Support the discussion.

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Once these steps have been completed, it should be fairly straightforward to write the appraisal. Refer to the writing section for hints and emphasize the bulleted points. Emphasize that it is feedback to improve performance, not a report card. A very valuable suggestion which combines the writing and conducting portions of the performance appraisal process is to ask the employee to write a self-evaluation and then sit down and write the actual appraisal as a collaborative effort. Ask the class for any other ideas or suggestions they have found valuable.

The ideas in conducting the appraisal are designed to be sure that the appraisal is heard in the spirit it should be intended; as an honest assessment of strengths and areas for improvement with opportunity for dialogue. Some suggestions which may be useful are to let the employee have the appraisal a day or two before the face-to-face meeting or to ask the employee to write a self-evaluation. This kind of preparation minimizes any potential surprises and will reduce the emotional content of any appraisal. Again, ask the class for any other suggestions they have found valuable.

Finally, emphasize the importance of planning for the future. This includes setting up new or revised goals, establishing consequences for meeting or missing goals, and discussing possible advancement or other rewards. A common recommendation is that fifty percent of the time on a performance appraisal should be spent discussing the future. This eliminates the "report card" feeling and acknowledges that there is no way to change the past and we need to look to the future.

3:45 Put the Course Goals overhead up. Tell the class it is time to write a performance appraisal of the course and teachers. There are several ways to do this. One is to let the class write the appraisal covering all goals as a group. With large groups, this is usually very inefficient. Another way is to divide the group into smaller groups and assign one or two goals to each group, depending on class size and number of goals. If this approach is used, recommend that each group read its appraisal to everyone before presenting it to you.

Note that one of the most important parts of this appraisal is for the teachers to get feedback as to how they can improve the course and their teaching, so honesty is critical. We want constructive suggestions as to what works and what doesn't.

At this point, the teachers should ask for questions and then leave the room. Allow a half hour for this if possible, but tell them to come get you if they finish early. If your goal is to finish by 5:00 PM, tell them they must finish by 4:40, for example. This course plan allows for a half hour for writing and a half hour for conducting the appraisal.

4:15 Teachers return and set up a format for conducting the appraisal. One or more people should actually deliver the appraisal to either the lead teacher or both teachers. This can be done in any convenient format. If the group was split into smaller groups, one person from each group should give the appropriate part of the appraisal.

As teachers listen to the appraisals, it is critical to model good listening skills. Ask for clarification as necessary but let the class do the talking. When the appraisals are complete, thank the class and ask for discussion and feedback. Discuss any suggestions and be sure you understand any criticisms. Collect the written appraisals or notes to save for part of the evaluation.

4:45 Fill in "Points to Remember" for the final time. Go around the group and have them contribute to an overall list on a transparency. Ask how they can put the course into effect in their work environments. Ask to name one thing they will do differently when they go back to work. Remind them of the value of networking with other supervisors they have met and using each other as resources.

4:50 Distribute Step Ahead evaluation forms and any evaluation forms which the hospital may require. Ask for candid comments and emphasize that they help us to modify the course and teaching to be most effective. Emphasize confidentiality. Thank them for their participation and remind them of other Step Ahead classes. Collect the evaluation forms as they leave.

5:00 Pack it in.

Follow-up:

Make sure all record keeping is complete: attendance, evaluations, appraisals collected. If possible, make copies of all evaluations and attendance sheets. Turn one set in to the hospital coordinator and return one to the Step Ahead coordinators.

Rearrange room and facilities if necessary. Thank hospital coordinators for their support.

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Customizing the course

- Do what you feel is helpful to the participants. Encourage them to bring in examples from their own work groups to workshop with the class. Set up impromptu role plays if appropriate. Get class discussions going about common situations. Demonstrate the value of networking with other supervisors.
- Encourage interaction: be a friend to the students. Develop a good friendly atmosphere in class. Offer personal experiences as illustration as appropriate. Stay on track, but be flexible and willing to tailor or leave out as appropriate.
- Use praise liberally and criticism judiciously. When doing role plays, ask for alternate ways of handling things from the class. Ask questions about the material rather than telling them what they are doing right or wrong. Call attention to good examples of good communication or correct use of the tchniques. Suggest alternative ways of communicating, rather than right ways and wrong ways.
- Encourage people to tell their stories, especially concerning using any of the techniques or skills we teach. Testimonials from peers are an excellent way to demonstrate the use of the skills. We're in the business of creating strong values for good communication. Personalize the class.
- Don't be afraid to leave out sections which are not appropriate for your particular class or mix of students. Don't be afraid to let a particularly productive discussion continue beyond the allotted time. Much of the Basics of Supervision may be old hat to experienced supervisors, but few people will have seen the Communication Styles, for example. The timelines are only suggestions.
- Getting good work from busy people is a challenge. Your role is to persuade, cajole, pressure, encourage, and praise people for being there and participating energetically. At times, it may be necessary to call on people to encourage participation and to break up pairs of friends, especially during role plays. Stay in control, but don't be rigid.

Record Keeping

- Keep good daily records of attendance. Use a class roster with names spelled correctly and departments listed. Keep track of attendance at each session. Work out the recording methods with the hospital coordinator.
- Keep up with the course. If you promise to find out something for the class, do it. Try to tie later discussions to earlier examples or ideas from the class.
- Keep notes on how the course goes. If there is too much to accomplish, figure out how to get back on track. Let us know if you think we expect too much on one day and not enough on the other. Let us know about errors in the materials, unforeseen problems, or areas we could improve.

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